



4-WEEK SLEEP CHALLENGE

Sleep is a well-being superpower.

Getting enough sleep helps with mood regulation and stress reduction, supports brain functioning and productivity, and aids immune functioning and heart health.

On the other hand, sleep deprivation can result in a litany of physical and mental health problems, including depression, cognitive impairment, and burnout. It also can impair social functioning—by making us feel

frustrated, cranky, and anxious and making it difficult to judge others' emotions and reactions.

Most adults function best on 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. But, according to the CDC, about 1 in 3 U.S. adults don't get enough sleep. And nearly 40% report falling asleep during the day without meaning to at least once a month.







Because sleep quality is important, use the **DREAM** framework to improve your sleep quantity and quality:

D is for **Darkness**. Darkness is essential, as light disrupts melatonin production, the hormone that signals sleepiness. Blackout curtains or a sleep mask can significantly improve sleep.

R is for **Routine** and **E** is for **Establishing** a Schedule. Consistency is also key. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends, to regulate your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. Also think about incorporating a pre-sleep routine into your day.

A is for **Avoiding** Screens. Electronic devices emit blue light, which suppresses melatonin. Power down phones, laptops, and TVs at least an hour before bed.

M is for **Moving** & Eating to Maximize Sleep. Regular physical activity promotes better sleep, but avoid strenuous workouts close to bedtime as they can be stimulating. Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bed, as they can disrupt sleep patterns.

WEEK 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
 Avoid screen time starting 1 hour before bed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Bedtime at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Wake-up at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 No alcohol or caffeine within 3 hours of bedtime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 7-8 hours of sleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 30 minutes exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

COLLECT DATA ON YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE







- Keep a daily record of what time you fall asleep and what time you get out of bed to start your day. Try a wearable sleep-tracker, if you'd like.
- "Clock watching" leads to mental math that increases arousal. So avoid looking at the time if you wake in the night. Turn your clock around or cover it up.

IMPROVE THE BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Make your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool. Use an eye mask, ear plugs, or a fan if they are helpful to you.
- Remove electronics from your bedroom: TV, laptop, and smartphone. If you use your smartphone's alarm to wake up at a set time, consider purchasing an alarm clock.

REDUCE SLEEP DISRUPTORS

- Slowly cut back on caffeine intake to no more than 1-2 servings a day before noon, especially if you have trouble falling asleep, wake frequently, or are awake for a long time in the middle of the night.
- Stop or cut back on substance use, as they can disrupt sleep. This includes alcohol and tobacco. Plan for no use 3-4 hours before bed.
- Avoid eating a large meal before bed, as this sends signals to the brain that it is time to be awake.
- For many, exercising in the evening can make it difficult to fall asleep. If this is the case for you, try to get activity earlier in the day.
- Many medications can affect your sleep or make you sleepy during the day. Check into possible side effects and talk to your healthcare provider.
- Discomfort due to pain or positioning can affect sleep. So, treat underlying conditions, and obtain a new bed if needed.







WEEK 2	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
 Avoid screen time starting 1 hour before bed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Bedtime at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Wake-up at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 No alcohol or caffeine within 3 hours of bedtime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 7-8 hours of sleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 30 minutes exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

IDENTIFY TROUBLE SPOTS

- If you identified many things in Week 1 that needed change, tackle them one at a time in Week 2. Too much change at once can be overwhelming.
- If you are sleepy during the day, this may mean you did not allow enough time for sleep. Most adults need 7 or more hours of sleep in a 24 hour period on a consistent basis, to feel rested. Very few of us can get by on less sleep.
- If you have trouble falling asleep or getting back to sleep in the middle of the night, avoid napping and spending more than 7 hours in bed per day. Set an alarm for the same time every morning, even if you have nothing planned. Get out of bed if you think you have been awake for longer than 15-20 minutes and do something relaxing. When you feel drowsy, go back to bed. Don't eat in the middle of the night, or use drugs/substances.
- Naps can be great, but keep them short! If they affect your ability to sleep at night, avoid them.
- If others report you stop breathing at night, or if you wake due to snorting/gasping, leg discomfort, or acting out dreams, see a healthcare provider for evaluation of a possible sleep disorder.

FOLLOW A SET SCHEDULE

- Going to bed at the same time and wake up at the same time this week. This is an important step in figuring out your natural sleep pattern. Start by picking a wake time you can stick to every day, even on the weekend.
- Go to bed only when drowsy.
- Wind down for at least an hour or two before you plan to go to sleep. It is important to send signals to your mind/body that it is time to get ready for bed. Some ideas include: putting on comfortable clothes, turning off electronics, reading something relaxing, taking a bath, drinking something warm like caffeine-free tea. Avoid work-related activities, watching the news, or talking to family members about touchy subjects at this time of night.
- Get up when your alarm goes off rather than using the snooze button. Engage in behavior that signals the start of the day. Stretch or exercise right away. Get in the shower. Get dressed, make your bed. Get outside into the morning air and sun if you can.

WEEK 3	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
 Avoid screen time starting 1 hour before bed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Bedtime at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Wake-up at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 No alcohol or caffeine within 3 hours of bedtime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 7-8 hours of sleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 30 minutes exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

ARE YOU A NIGHT OWL, MORNING LARK, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN?

- Benefits of finding your circadian (biological) rhythm include more energy and less risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and mental health disorders.
- Paying attention to what hours you sleep on the weekends or when you are off work for an extended time, can be a helpful clue to your natural sleep/wake cycle. You will likely drift towards this timing when you do not have other responsibilities.
- Behavior and routine are key! If you have not gotten rid of bad habits or addressed issues that may be affecting your sleep, you may have trouble identifying your circadian rhythm.







FINE TUNE YOUR CLOCK

- Now that you are following a routine sleep schedule, note the best time of day (morning, midmorning, afternoon, evening or late evening) for the following:
 - Cognitive tasks like concentrating on things.
 - Feeling energetic or lively (note: this could be a good time to exercise).

- Eating: Is there a certain time of the day you take in most of your calories? You may need to experiment with moving this to different times. Notice if your body feels refreshed or sluggish after a meal.
- Is there a certain time of day you feel sleepy or your brain slows down? This is a good time to take a break. Don't use your phone. Instead, stretch your legs, let your mind wander, get a drink of water, or take a short nap.

SLOW, GENTLE CORRECTION

- Based on the information you gathered above, start to adjust your daytime behavior and sleep schedule to accommodate your natural sleep/wake cycle.
- For example, gradually move the majority of your calorie consumption to the time of day you feel most hungry. Avoid eating too close to bedtime.
- A strong tool for setting your clock is to increase your exposure to natural or artificial bright light in the morning (e.g., a 30-minute walk the first thing in the morning). This sends a signal through the optic nerves in the eyes to the "master clock" in the brain.

WEEK 4	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
 Avoid screen time starting 1 hour before bed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Bedtime at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 Wake-up at: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 No alcohol or caffeine within 3 hours of bedtime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 7-8 hours of sleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 30 minutes exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

RELAXATION

- To set yourself up for success, remember to incorporate the good sleep habits and eliminate the sleep disruptors addressed in previous weeks.
- Try to manage stress. Manage your priorities and avoid being overscheduled.
- Have quiet reflection time each day. Look out a window, sit in your back yard, use meditation or guided imagery.
- In addition to mental relaxation, physical relaxation techniques may be helpful such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, or tai chi.
- Try music, recommended essential oils, or a soothing bath.

EXERCISE AND DIET

- Move more and sit less. When you exercise, you sleep better and vice versa.
- Eat a balanced diet with adequate servings of fruits/vegetables.

STOP TRYING TO SLEEP

- You can't force sleeping. You need to prepare well and be ready when it comes.
- To help "turn your brain off at night, take 15 minutes a day to write down your feelings, concerns, and worries. Then mentally and physically put those thoughts away for the next 24 hours, by closing the notebook or throwing away the paper. Forget about them! If they start to creep into your thoughts at night, gently push them away.

Congratulations on completing this 4-Week Sleep Challenge!

If you had many challenges to overcome, it may take a few more weeks to see improvements in your daytime tiredness and ability to fall/stay asleep.

This worksheet was adapted from the Minnesota Sleep Society's 4-week challenge template (mnsleep.net).

Author Bio: Dr. Anne M. Brafford, JD, MAPP, PhD, is the owner of Aspire, an education and consulting firm for the legal profession. She is a co-founder of the Institute for Well-Being in Law, the creator of the annual Well-Being Week in Law, and co-chair of WWIL 2025. She can be reached at abrafford@aspire.legal.