

Start Sleeping Better

How I Transformed my Sleep in 30 Days



Why read this book?

Because you're tired (pun intended) of waking up just-in-time to leave for work, with little or no energy, unable to think clearly, looking and feeling like you've not slept for days.

You've had enough. You're looking for someone who's experienced all of the above and now sleeps well and, wakes up at 6.30am every morning without an alarm clock and feeling ready-to-go even in the winter dark mornings.

I think it fair to say that sleep is probably the most overlooked and underrated part of our health. Although in recent years, we are taking it more seriously judging by the sleep tracking wearable devices now available.

Lack of sleep has more effect on our physical and mental health than water, food or exercise suggests Matthew Walker, author and professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Waking up tired with little energy and leaving home with just enough time to get to work, is how I started my working day for almost thirty years.

Until I read 'Sleep' by Nick Littlehales an elite sports sleep coach.

What the book gave me completely changed how I prepare for sleep and how I start each new day. Now, with a few additional tweaks of my own, I'd like to share with you, what the book taught me and how I applied it to my day.

What's my sleep story?

In December 2020 I read a book on sleep. I wasn't looking to improve my sleep. It was simply in a list of books recommended by Amazon's algorithm.

To be honest I'd not given my sleep a second thought. I knew it wasn't particularly good, but after almost 30 years I'd come to accept it was, what it was.

That said, I bought the book. It was only a couple of dollars and I was curious. I'm an advocate of self-help.

Go find a solution, try it for 30 days. If it works, great, if not, go try something else.

So, I read the book. Several times in fact. It made a lot of sense. It offered a fascinating insight into sleep. The light-bulb moment for me was the idea of a pre-sleep routine.

Reverse engineering the time I went to bed based on the time I wanted to get up.

The book appeared to hold the answers to getting a great night's sleep. All I had to do was try it. Give it a week, I thought. If there were signs of improvement, I'd do another week.



The Snooze Button and Me

In the early days, seven days a week, my morning routine started when the alarm went off, followed by me hitting the snooze button, rolling over and catching another 15 minutes of light sleep before finally crawling out of bed. Here's what it looked like;

- Go to bed between 10.30pm and 1am. Lie awake until 2am, my head spinning with ideas and check lists for the following day.
- Wake up around 3am to visit the bathroom.
- The alarm goes off at 7am, I hit snooze and roll over, often falling asleep again.
- I get up at 7.50am feeling tired, with just enough time to get ready and out the door. Breakfast including any thought of a coffee, didn't stand a chance.



Even when I started my own business and was working from home, I'd walk in to the office feeling tired and spend most of the morning trying to wake up.

Not the best way to start your day. It sounds obvious to me now but, the snooze button IS NOT your friend. **I was a mess.**

My Perfect Night's Sleep (well almost)

Fast forward to December 2020 and my routine could not be more different.

- I fall asleep within 20 minutes of going to bed.
- Trips to the bathroom are very rare, meaning no broken sleep.
- I wake up around 6.30am. Even in the dark Winter mornings, I get up feeling more awake than ever before.
- During the Summer, with the bedroom bathed in sunlight, I'll usually get up just after 6am. Yes, I get less sleep, but the sunlight has a wonderful energising effect.
- Starting work at 8.30am, leaves me a good 2 hours most mornings to sit down with a coffee, catch up online and go through my check list for the day.

This is how 98% of my mornings start. There will always be 'off' days. Nights out, working late, illness and so on. But to wake up without relying on an alarm clock and having the time to enjoy breakfast before starting work, is priceless.

Tip: In the morning, I found that waiting for my eyes to open naturally, rather than forcing them to open, before I got out of bed, made a difference in how I felt.

Think Cycles rather than Hours

We sleep in cycles of around 90 minutes. Each cycle goes through four stages. Most of us need 35 sleep cycles per week. That's five cycles of 90 minutes each night.

For the purpose of this guide, I'm going to leave it at that. You can think of these cycles as;

- Stage 1: Dozing off,
- Stage 2: Light Sleep,
- Stage 3: Deep Sleep (where all the repair work happens) and,
- Stage 4: REM (Rapid Eye Movement) Sleep, where we dream, before returning to light sleep.

This cycle takes around 90 minutes and continues throughout the night. If you've ever caught yourself momentarily waking during the night, rolling over before going back to sleep. That's you completing a cycle.

Tip: If you miss a sleep cycle, you have the rest of the week to make it up. I'll explain how this can be done and the best time of the day, in forthcoming emails.

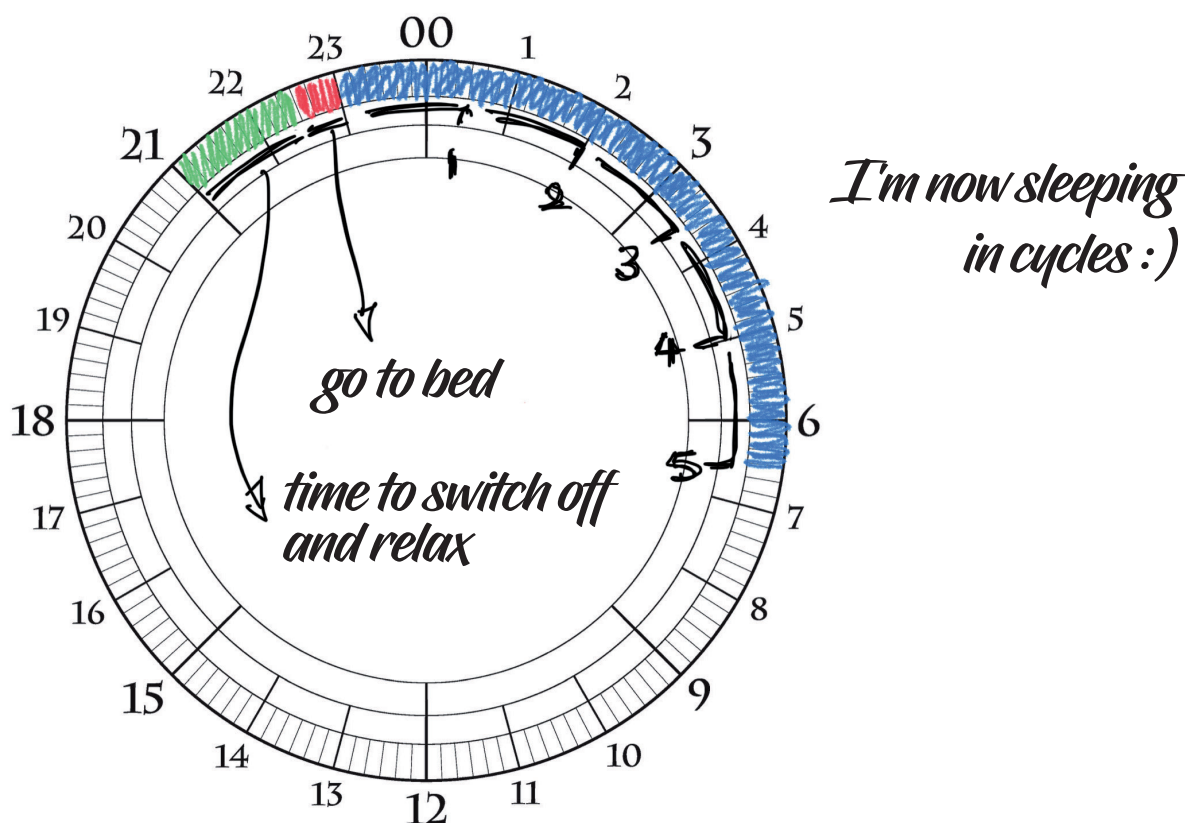
Start with your wake time

This was the biggest revelation for me. **Reverse-engineering the time I went to bed** based on the time I wanted to wake up.

- For me getting up at 6.30am (6am in Summer), would give me time to have breakfast, a coffee, read and stretch all before starting work around 8.30am.
- That meant if I was going to finish my last sleep cycle at 6.30am, I needed to be asleep by 11pm the night before. (5 cycles of 90 minutes)
- These days it takes me about 20 minutes to fall asleep. Allowing time to get myself ready for bed, I'd go up no later than 10.15pm.

That's seven and a half hours sleep per night. After the first week, my body had already started to adjust to sleeping in cycles.

I was waking up within 5-10 minutes of my target time of 6.30am. Without relying on my alarm clock. If I woke up during the night (at the end of a sleep cycle), it was always the same time. I was starting to sleep in cycles. My body clock was resetting itself.



The chart above, shows my pre-sleep routine times, through to the following morning. You'll find a blank printable version to work-out your ideal pre-sleep, sleep and wake times at the back of this guide, along with a 'Wake-time' look-up table.

The Sacrifices

What do I mean by sacrifices? Reasons we often don't start something new. Up there with lack of motivation. Switching off your mobile or tablet. Or putting it out of reach.

That's as bad as it gets. How many of us are really spending quality time on our devices after 9pm at night? Your favourite YouTuber or influencer will still be there tomorrow.

Remember, you're going to be making time for yourself every morning. No more rushing out the door to arrive at work with five minutes to spare. It's not sustainable.

At 9pm, an hour before I go to bed, I stop using my tablet and watch something on TV that's easy on the mind. You don't want to be watching or reading anything that's going to keep your mind active later, when you're trying to sleep.

In the first few weeks, I could feel the difference, even though I was waking up around 3.30am to go to the bathroom. Interestingly that's three complete sleep cycles.

My sleep was definitely better, but waking up in the middle of the night left me with broken sleep. And that meant waking up around 6.40am - 6.45am. The difference being the time it took me to fall asleep again.

To fix this, I stopped drinking water at 8pm rather than 9pm. First night I slept straight through, waking up just before 6.30am. Such a small easy change had delivered a great result. I couldn't remember the last time this had happened.

I wasn't tired, no eye strain or headaches from late night reading and, my body was ready to get up. Even in the Winter months I was waking up on time. This was all new to me.

Keeping it Cool

I now had the pre-sleep routine delivering results. But what about when you're actually in bed. I usually leave a window open, curtains closed and the heating in the bedroom is switched off a few hours before going to bed. **That leaves the room dark and cool.**

During the Summer, when night-time temperatures may not drop below 19 degrees C or 66 degrees F, and sleeping can be difficult, you appreciate the effect temperature has on sleep. Just those few degrees can make all the difference.

Position in sleep matters

For as long as I can remember, sleeping on my back suited me. Part of my transformation was switching to lying on my side. Which side you find more comfortable may come down to which side of the bed you sleep on and which side your partner faces.

These days I lie on my right-hand side, with my legs bent in a fetal position to stop me rolling on to my front.

Within a weeks I was totally comfortable. To keep my head in alignment with my spine, I bought a softer, shallower pillow.

You'll know when you have the right combination of position and pillow. No aches and pains in the morning and you didn't spend the night rearranging the pillow.

I recently invested in a multi-layered 'out-of-the-box' mattress. For me the final piece of the jigsaw. The perfect balance of support and comfort. Being layered, we were able to fine tune the softness, by adding a free-of-charge extra layer.

Clear your head before bed

Go to bed with a clear head. Easier said than done, I know. **It used to take me an hour or more to fall asleep.** I found myself going through my day at work, what I'd watched or read that evening.

My head would be buzzing with ideas, problems and tomorrow's work schedule. That said, I consider myself lucky that's all I had to worry about.

To make this work, **I chose to clear my head before bed.** Switching off at least 90 minutes before going to bed meant less ideas bouncing around my head when I should be sleeping.

Introducing the **Ivy Lee method of to-do lists**, helped me to prioritise what I was doing the following day. All this before I went to bed.

One trick I use if I'm struggling to sleep, is tapping my leg in a gentle alternating rhythm. I can't claim credit for this, but I find it works with practice. You'll find it on the TEDx channel on YouTube.

The way it works for me is; tap your leg with the tips of your fingers at one second intervals, left hand then right hand. Over a period of 2-3 minutes, start reducing the rate to 3-4 seconds between each tap.

As you slow the tapping down, you should find your breathing slows too. It took some practice. But it can help to switch your focus to sleeping rather than allowing your mind to wander and keep you awake.

Start as you mean to go on

Before you start this new practice and build it into a routine, let's address motivation. Motivation often gets the blame for us not starting anything new, or taking that first step.

I'd argue that's a myth. In his book *The Motivation Myth*, author Jeff Haden says; 'I thought motivation was a prerequisite to starting a tedious learning process—a spark necessary to get me going.'

But motivation is really a result. Motivation is the fire that starts burning **after** you manually, painfully, coax it into existence, and it feeds on the satisfaction of seeing yourself make progress. The problem with waiting for motivation to strike is that it almost never comes with enough voltage to actually get you started.'

Basically we need to take action first. The motivation and momentum to continue comes from actually taking that first step. However small that first step, if you took it, you should congratulate yourself. So many talk themselves out of doing anything.

I told myself I would at least try what I'd read. The process seemed easy enough. I stop drinking at 8pm, put my tablet away at 9pm and in bed by 10.30pm.

Make sure the window is open, curtains closed and heating off. Lie on my side, adjust the pillow and let myself relax.

That first morning felt better. Not perfect, but enough for me to say, 'I'll try it again tonight'. And that's all it takes. **A small commitment to at least try it for a few nights.**

Don't expect overnight transformations. It didn't happen for me and I don't expect it will for you. But what I did notice within a few nights was, I had started waking up close to my target wake-time. Without relying on my alarm clock.

Are you up for a challenge?

My challenge to you, requires nothing more than printing off the '**30 Day Challenge**' sheet (you'll find a copy at the back) and pinning it somewhere you'll see it daily. Next to your bed, in the bathroom, on the fridge door. Somewhere you'll be reminded that tonight you're taking small steps to improving your sleep.

The 2-day Rule

Distractions will happen. A missed day, here and there is going to happen. But tell yourself you won't miss two days in a row. The aim here is to build a routine that starts 90 minutes before you go to bed. A routine you feel comfortable with.

So when it's time to switch off those devices, you do it. **Not because you have to, but because you choose to.**

Conclusion

The world is waking up, as I did, to the importance sleep plays on our well-being. The science proves how important it is on our mental and physical health.

What I'm offering here are the basics. How I reset my internal body clock, and sleeping better than I have in over 30 years. This isn't a marketing pitch.

All you need, is the mindset to at least give it a go. Not, pick and choose, what suits your current habits. **'If you continue doing what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got'**, as the saying goes.

Imagine waking up not as tired as you did this morning. Giving yourself time in the morning to enjoy breakfast at home or grab a coffee on your way to work without getting stressed because the queue this morning is out the door and you're late for work.

To be able to catch an earlier train or bus to work. It's about you controlling time, not time pressuring you.

Sleep well, Martin

PS: One final note

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to download my guide **'Start Sleeping Better'**. I can only share what worked for me, but I believe most of us simply need to learn how to reset our internal body clock in order to feel the benefits that come after a great night's sleep.

If you know or suspect your poor sleep is the result of more than just bad habits, please seek professional medical help. I'm not a medical doctor, and my notes are not to be used in replacement for professional advice given by a trained medical practitioner.

I've included links below to Nick's book, 'Sleep' and Matthew Walker's website Sleep Diplomat should you wish to read more.

(Full disclosure; I do not receive any financial payment should you purchase a copy of 'Sleep'. I only recommend it because of the impact it had on me and, the quality of sleep I now enjoy.)

I wish you well with your 30 Day Challenge. If you have any questions, or you'd like me to expand on anything in these notes, please drop me a line at hello@sleepforbreakfast.com

PPS: I'll be sharing more on how I transformed my sleep including actionable tips every week in my Saturday newsletter. For eg; How I catch up on missed sleep, which sleeping position works best for me and why I only drink coffee in the morning.

Little by little, you'll be able to adjust your sleep for the better, by introducing small but powerful changes to your sleep routine.

Links you may find interesting

Matthew Walker -- <https://www.sleepdiplomat.com/>

Sleep by Nick Littlehales -- <https://www.amazon.com/Sleep-Redefine-Your-Success-Sport/dp/0241975972/>



Better Sleep in 30 Days

Make a Commitment to yourself

Over the next 30 days I will practice preparing for a great night's sleep by putting away my smartphone, tablet or book 90 minutes before I go to bed.

Why am I doing this?

Because I want to be able to relax and switch off at night, fall asleep naturally and stop feeling tired and rushed in the mornings. I will start listening to my body clock and not rely on my alarm clock.

- I want to start my day at am
- That means asleep by pm
- I will put away my (smartphone, tablet, laptop, book) and relax at pm
- Mark the days you completed with a Smiley face :)

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	



I completed the 30 day challenge, what next?

Congratulations! If you completed more days than you missed, that's fantastic :)

The challenge is all about taking your first steps towards a better night's sleep. The more nights you commit to, the quicker your body will adapt and find it's own natural rhythm.

Don't stop now...

If you really want to establish this new routine as a healthy habit and, set yourself up for the long term health benefits quality sleep will give you, simply repeat until it becomes your new normal. Science suggests around 30 days to build a new habit.

Every morning you wake up feeling refreshed, alert and with time to enjoy a coffee, tea or breakfast is a step towards a happier, healthier you. **Embrace that feeling.**

It's all in the Planning

Start with your Wake-up Time

A 6.30am wake-up time works best for me across the whole week. Remember your body clock's rhythm is the same every day of the week. Work with that rhythm to get the best results.

<i>Fall-asleep</i>	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5	<i>Wake-up</i>
9.30pm	11.00pm	12.30am	2.00am	3.30am	5.00am	5.00am
10.00pm	11.30pm	1.00am	2.30am	4.00am	5.30am	5.30am
10.30pm	12.00am	1.30am	3.00am	4.30am	6.00am	6.00am
11.00pm	12.30am	2.00am	3.30am	5.00am	6.30am	6.30am
11.30pm	1.00am	2.30am	4.00am	5.30am	7.00am	7.00am

