

The wake-time anchor

The body's sleep-wake rhythm has an anchor, and the anchor is wake time, not bedtime.

If you can hold one thing steady, hold the time you get out of bed. Bedtime can then begin to settle, gradually, as the body's pressure to sleep builds across the day. The aim of this worksheet is not perfection. It is fourteen days of steady wake time, with light and movement soon after, and an honest record of what shifts.

i This is not a sleep program. If sleep has been difficult for months, the wake-time anchor sits alongside other work. It is one piece, and a useful first one. It is not a substitute for a clinical sleep program.

THE SCIENCE, BRIEFLY

Process S, sleep pressure

From the moment you wake, the brain builds pressure to sleep again. The longer you are awake, and the more demand the day places on you, the higher that pressure climbs by night.

Process C, the circadian rhythm

A roughly 24-hour signal in the body, anchored largely by light in the eyes soon after waking. A steady anchor means a steady signal. A drifting anchor means a drifting signal.

WHAT ANCHORING THE WAKE TIME TENDS TO DO

Steadies the signal

- Sleep pressure builds on a predictable schedule
- The circadian signal stays anchored to one point
- Sleepiness arrives at a more predictable time at night
- The variability the body has to absorb is reduced

WHAT CHASING MISSED SLEEP TENDS TO DO

Drifts the signal

- Weekend sleep-ins push the rhythm later, week after week
- The Sunday-night insomnia loop becomes familiar
- Light exposure shifts later, so the signal drifts later
- The body keeps trying to guess what time it is

HOW TO USE THE ANCHOR FOR FOURTEEN DAYS

1 Pick one wake time

The same time every day, weekends included. Choose a time that fits the life you actually live, not the one you wish you lived.

2 Get out of bed

Out of bed at that time, even on poor-sleep nights. The wake time is not when the alarm goes off; it is when your feet leave the floor.

3 Get light, soon

Outdoor light is strongest. By a bright window if the morning is dark or cold. Ten to twenty minutes in the first hour is the usual aim.

CHOOSING YOUR ANCHOR TIME

Pick the earliest time you must reliably be up on a working weekday, then hold it on the weekend too.

- **Make it realistic, not aspirational.** If you must be at work by 9, a 6:30 wake time may be the anchor. A 5:30 wake time may be hard to keep up by day four.
- **Shift workers and parents of young children** are exceptions where a single anchor may not be possible. Bring this to a conversation rather than forcing one.
- **It is the time your feet hit the floor**, not the time the alarm sounds. Allow ten minutes for getting up if that is how you wake.
- **Once chosen, hold it for the fortnight.** If the anchor changes partway through, the record is harder to read, so it can help to start the count again from day one.

WHAT THE FORTNIGHT USUALLY LOOKS LIKE, BROADLY

DAYS 1 TO 3

The body has not adjusted yet

Mornings can feel harder. Sleepiness may arrive earlier in the evening than it used to, or not at all. Note it in the tracker, and raise it with your clinician if it worries you.

DAYS 4 TO 7

Bedtime may begin to shift

For some people, sleep pressure starts to build on a more predictable schedule, and the time they feel ready for bed begins to settle. Others notice little change yet.

WEEK 2

The rhythm may start to hold

Some people find wake time less effortful by now, and sleepiness arriving at a more regular hour. Poor nights still happen. Everyone's pattern is different, so note what you see.

REMEMBER The wake-time anchor is a small, steady action. Any change tends to be gradual and differs between people. If the first week feels harder, note it and bring it to your clinician.

Fourteen-day wake-time anchor

One row per day for two weeks.

Best guesses are fine; partial rows are still useful. The pattern across the fortnight is what matters, not any single day. The “out of bed” column is the one that defines the anchor.

DAY & DATE	WAKE TIME e.g. 6:45 AM	OUT OF BED feet on floor	LIGHT SOON AFTER minutes	ENERGY BY MIDDAY 1 to 10	ANYTHING TO NOTE
WEEK 1					
Day 1 date:					
Day 2 date:					
Day 3 date:					
Day 4 date:					
Day 5 date:					
Day 6 date:					
Day 7 date:					
WEEK 2					
Day 8 date:					
Day 9 date:					
Day 10 date:					
Day 11 date:					
Day 12 date:					
Day 13 date:					
Day 14 date:					

When the fortnight is done, you can sit with what you notice, or bring the tracker to a first conversation. Either is a fine next step.

AFTER THE FOURTEEN DAYS

What did the pattern show

Where did the body start to settle. Where did it not. Which days felt easier. Which days felt harder, and what was the day before doing.

MEET AND GREET

- Free
- 15 minutes
- Online or in-person
- No obligation