

The Sleep Audit

A practical guide from Dr. Nicola Schmitz

How To Use This Audit

Go through this document slowly. Do not try to fix everything at once. The point is to see where the biggest opportunities are for you, specifically. Most adults have three or four things they could adjust that would meaningfully change their nights.

Walk through each section and answer honestly. Mark items where you are already doing well, and items where there is room. At the end, pick one or two adjustments to try for the next two weeks. Then return to this document and pick the next ones.

The body adapts to consistency, not to perfection. Small steady changes are more effective than dramatic overhauls.

THE BEDROOM ENVIRONMENT

Temperature. Most adults sleep best between sixteen and eighteen degrees Celsius. How warm is your bedroom at night? Does it warm up overnight? Do you sleep under too many blankets that prevent the temperature dip?

Darkness. Even small amounts of ambient light reduce sleep quality. Is your room genuinely dark? Are there streetlights, electronics with LEDs, ambient sources? Do you have blackout curtains or a sleep mask?

Quiet. Unexpected sounds wake the brain even when they do not wake you fully. Is your room quiet? Do you use earplugs or white noise if needed? Is a partner snoring or moving disrupting your sleep?

Air quality. Do you ventilate the bedroom regularly? Are there synthetic fragrances from candles, plug-ins, or laundry products? Is there any visible or suspected mold in this room or adjacent spaces?

Electronics. Where does your phone sleep? Within arm's reach, or in another room? Is it on airplane mode at night? Is there a Wi-Fi router within a few meters of your bed?

THE EVENING ROUTINE

Light exposure. Bright light, particularly blue light from screens, in the evening suppresses melatonin. How bright is the lighting in your home in the last two hours before bed? Are you on screens until lights-out?

Food and drink timing. How long before bed do you eat your last meal? Ideally three hours or more. Do you drink alcohol most evenings? How many drinks, what time? Do you drink caffeine after lunch?

Nervous system winding down. Do you have any specific transition between the day's activity and sleep, or do you go from a screen straight to bed? Do you read, stretch, take a warm shower? Are you working on stressful material in the last hour?

Bedtime consistency. Do you go to bed at roughly the same time most nights, within a thirty-minute window? Do your weekends differ significantly from weekdays?

DURING SLEEP

Falling asleep. How long does it take you to fall asleep after lights off? Ideally ten to twenty minutes. Do you tend to fall asleep in front of the television? Is your mind quiet or racing when you lie down?

Staying asleep. Do you sleep through the night, or do you wake? If you wake, at what time, and what do you suspect is waking you? Do you check your phone if you wake?

Early morning waking. Waking between three and five in the morning, unable to return to sleep, is often a sign of elevated cortisol. Do you wake early and feel wired or anxious rather than tired? On how many nights per week?

DURING THE DAY

Morning light. Exposure to natural light within the first hour of waking helps anchor the circadian rhythm. Do you get outside, or near a bright window, within the first hour? Or do you spend the first hours indoors with artificial light only?

Daytime stress regulation. Sleep is shaped by what happens during the day, not just at bedtime. Do you have any practices that help your nervous system come down? Do you exercise, and at what time? Do you have moments of unstimulated rest?

Caffeine. How many caffeinated drinks daily? When is your last one? Have you experimented with stopping caffeine by noon?

WHERE TO START

Move your phone. Out of arm's reach, or on airplane mode at night. This is the single most leveraged change for many adults.

Cool the bedroom. Around eighteen degrees Celsius if you can.

Dim or warm the lights. An hour before bed. Stop screens thirty minutes before sleep.

Set a consistent bedtime. Within a thirty-minute window. Keep it on weekends.

Get morning light. Fifteen minutes of bright light, ideally outdoors, within an hour of waking.

Note for persistent problems. If you do this work and sleep is still difficult, consider deeper investigation: chronic daytime stress, hormonal shifts in perimenopause and menopause, sleep apnea (often undiagnosed in women), mold exposure, nutrient deficiencies, or underlying conditions warranting medical evaluation.

From Alter Health: The Epigenetic Code. New episodes every Tuesday. Dr. Nicola Schmitz