

A Quick Guide to Supporting Your Body's Natural Clock

Does your dog get the zoomies at a predictable time every day, like my dog, Loki? Like clockwork, between 8 PM and 9 PM, he suddenly transforms into a furry speed racer, darting from the bedroom to the kitchen and back through the living room. It's all part of his daily routine driven by his internal clock – his **circadian rhythm**.

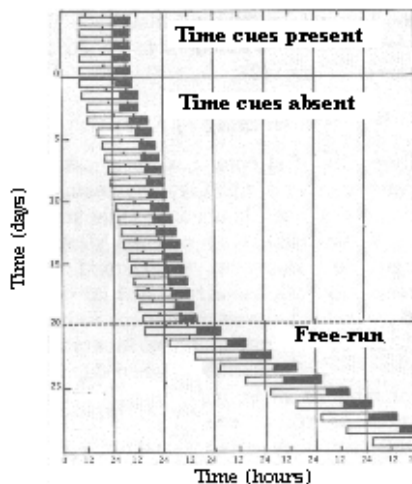
Just like our dogs, humans also have a circadian rhythm that runs on a 24-hour cycle, controlling our sleep-wake cycle, hormone levels, energy, appetite, and even our mood. Understanding this rhythm helps explain why our energy levels can vary throughout the day, and it helps explain Loki's nightly burst of excitement.

Two Key Hormones Guide our Circadian Rhythm:

- **Cortisol:** This is the alertness hormone, which rises in the morning to help you wake up and get energized to start the day.
- **Melatonin:** This is the sleep hormone, which rises in the evening in response to darkness, helping you wind down and get ready for sleep.

These hormones help you feel awake during the day and sleepy at night — but they need external cues to stay on track.

Fun fact: Our exact internal clock is **actually closer to 24.2 hours**. That is, if we didn't have external cues to keep us aligned to our 24-hour daylight schedule, we would end up delaying our sleep cycle by about 12 minutes each night, eventually causing quite a disruption to our schedule as shown in the image below (when time cues are absent).



Modified from D.F. Dinges, "The Nature of Timing and Sleep", 1984

Figure 1 Source: <https://millar.bio.ed.ac.uk/andrewM/CBT%20tutorial/HUMANCLOCK.html>



The Importance of Zeitgebers (External Cues)

Your body relies on **Zeitgebers** (a German term meaning time-givers), which are the external cues that help align our internal clock with the 24-hour day. The three most powerful Zeitgebers are:

- 1. Light:** Morning light acts like a natural alarm clock. It stops melatonin production and boosts cortisol production, giving you energy to start the day. At night, the absence of light triggers melatonin production, helping you fall asleep.

Health tip: Get 10–15 minutes of natural light within 1-2 hours after waking up, and dim screens and lights in the evening to help support melatonin production. Use a blue-light filter in your phone or laptop, or consider special glasses that help block blue-light.

- 2. Food:** The timing of your meals matters. Eating at consistent times each day helps keep your circadian rhythm aligned with your daily activities, maintaining steady energy levels. Eating late at night may make it difficult for you to fall asleep.

Health tip: Try to eat meals earlier in the day, and avoid eating 2–3 hours before bedtime to avoid delaying your sleep onset.

- 3. Movement:** Physical activity strengthens your circadian rhythm. Morning or daytime movement boosts energy, while gentle movement in the evening can help you unwind.

Health tip: Even a short walk in the morning or after meals can make a big difference in your energy level and sleep quality.

The Importance of Consistency

Your circadian rhythm thrives on **consistency**. A regular sleep, wake, eating, and activity schedule helps entrain your body's internal clock to maximize your energy throughout the day. This is especially important for those who no longer have the structured routine of work or school, such as those who are retired.

Most importantly, remember: It's not about perfection— it's about making small, daily choices that help your body stay aligned and help you maintain optimal energy throughout the day.

Ready to Make Sleep Work for You?

If you're struggling with daytime sleepiness, brain fog, fatigue or having trouble falling or staying asleep, it may be time for a sleep consultation.

As a board-certified sleep physician, I want you to know: it doesn't have to be that way.

At **DreamLife Medicine & Wellness**, we'll take a thorough look at your sleep — and all the factors in your life that may be impacting it — to figure out what's preventing you from feeling truly rested. No judgment, no quick fixes. Just real answers and support that makes sense for you.

Because sleep isn't a luxury — it's a foundation for everything.

- Dr. Guzman, DreamLife Medicine & Wellness