

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Sleep & Rest Toolkit

Gentle, science-informed tools to help you fall asleep easier, wake less often, and feel like yourself in the morning — one small habit at a time.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- How sleep actually works — in plain language
- The proven habits that rebuild deep, steady sleep
- A 14-day sleep diary to reveal your patterns
- A wind-down routine builder and a racing-thoughts dump page
- A bedroom audit, a caffeine and screen tracker, and a ready-made middle-of-the-night plan
- Cut-out wind-down cards, morning check-ins, and weekly reviews

A printable self-help pack built on well-researched sleep habits and calming skills.

How to Use This Toolkit

Welcome. If your nights have felt like a struggle — long stretches of staring at the ceiling, waking at 3 a.m., mornings that feel like wading through fog — you are far from alone. Sleep runs on habits and signals, and habits and signals can be changed. This pack walks you through it, one page and one week at a time.

Getting started

1. **Start with the sleep diary — and change nothing yet.** For your first week, just fill in the diary each morning. No new rules, no pressure. You are collecting a baseline, and it will show you things guessing never will.
2. **Read the two education pages.** "How Sleep Actually Works" and "The Rules That Rebuild Sleep" explain *why* the tools in this pack work. Ten minutes of reading makes every other page easier to use.
3. **Pick one or two changes at a time.** This is the golden rule of the whole pack. Changing everything at once is exhausting and makes it impossible to tell what helped. Choose your one or two, run them for a week or two, then review.
4. **Build your wind-down routine.** Use the routine builder to design your last hour of the day, and keep the racing-thoughts page nearby for busy-brain evenings.
5. **Set up your night plan before you need it.** Fill in the "If I Can't Sleep" plan while you are calm and rested. Middle-of-the-night you will be grateful.
6. **Review weekly.** After each diary week, use the weekly review page to spot patterns and choose your next small change.

A few gentle reminders

- Sleep responds slowly. Give each change one to two weeks before judging it.
- One rough night does not undo your progress. Look at the trend, not the night.
- Worksheet and tracker pages are meant to be reused — print as many copies as you like.
- These pages are self-help, not treatment. If sleep problems are long-standing or severe, the page "When Sleep Needs More Than Habits" will help you decide when to talk to a professional.

I am starting this toolkit on (date):

If my sleep improved, the first thing I'd notice in my days would be:

How Sleep Actually Works

Two forces run your sleep — and you can work with both

Sleep is not something you *do*. It is something your body does *for* you when two natural forces line up. Understanding them turns confusing nights into something you can actually influence.

Force 1: Sleep pressure

From the moment you wake up, your brain starts building a chemical "hunger" for sleep. Scientists call it sleep pressure. Every waking hour adds to it; being active adds even more. By night, the pressure should be strong enough to pull you under.

Here is the catch: naps and evening dozing on the couch *snack* on that pressure. A long late nap can drain exactly the fuel your bedtime needed.

Force 2: Your body clock

Deep in your brain sits a 24-hour clock that decides when you feel alert and when you feel sleepy. It does not read your schedule — it reads **light**. Bright morning light tells it "the day has started." Dim evenings tell it "night is coming."

When bedtimes and wake times jump around, or when evenings stay bright, the clock drifts — and you end up wide awake at midnight and groggy at 7 a.m. It can feel like permanent jet lag without ever boarding a plane.

Why scrolling in bed backfires

Your phone works against both forces at once:

- **It shines bright light at close range**, telling your body clock it is still daytime — right when you need the opposite message.
- **It feeds your brain an endless stream of interesting things**. Alertness rises with every swipe, and there is no natural stopping point.
- **It teaches your brain that bed is a place to be awake**. Do it often enough and simply lying down starts switching your mind *on* instead of off.

Why trying harder makes it worse

Sleep is like relaxing your shoulders — you cannot clench your way there. When you lie in bed *working* at sleep (checking the time, counting the hours left, ordering yourself to drift off), your body reads the effort as stress. Stress means alertness. Alertness means no sleep. The harder you chase it, the faster it runs.

The way out is sideways, not harder: build sleep pressure during the day, give your clock steady light and timing signals, and let go of the chase at night. That is exactly what the rest of this pack helps you do.

The Rules That Rebuild Sleep

Six habits that retrain your brain to sleep — choose one or two to start

These habits come from decades of sleep research. None of them are complicated. Their power is in repetition: each one sends your brain the same clear message, night after night, until sleep becomes automatic again.

1. Keep the bed for sleep

No working, eating, scrolling, worrying, or watching in bed (intimacy is the one classic exception). You are training a simple association: **bed = sleep**. The fewer awake-things happen there, the faster lying down starts to feel like an off switch.

2. If you're awake around 20 minutes or more, get up

This is the rule that surprises people most. Lying in bed frustrated teaches your brain that bed is a wrestling ring. Instead: get up, keep lights low, do something calm and boring, and come back **when you feel sleepy** — heavy eyelids, drifting attention. Your "If I Can't Sleep" plan (later in this pack) makes this easy. Estimate the 20 minutes; never clock-watch.

3. Wake up at the same time every day — yes, even weekends

A fixed wake time is the anchor for your entire body clock. Sleeping in on Sunday feels kind, but it shifts your clock later — which is why Sunday night insomnia and miserable Mondays so often travel together. Keep your wake time steady within about an hour, and let bedtime follow your sleepiness.

4. Get daylight in the first hour

Ten to twenty minutes of morning daylight — outside, or right by a bright window — sets your clock for the whole day and helps sleepiness arrive on time that night. Cloudy days still count; outdoor light is far brighter than it looks.

5. Mind your caffeine timing

Caffeine can stay active in your body for six to ten hours. A 4 p.m. coffee can still be nudging your brain at 11. Most people sleep better with their **last caffeine by early afternoon** — and remember tea, cola, energy drinks, and chocolate count too.

6. Be smart about naps

While you are rebuilding your nights, naps are borrowed money — they spend the sleep pressure your bedtime needs. If your nights are struggling, skip naps for now, or keep them **short (about 20 minutes) and before mid-afternoon**.

Remember the golden rule: pick one or two of these, not all six. Steady beats heroic. And expect a change to feel harder before it feels better — that is normal, and it passes.

14-Day Sleep Diary

Week 1 — print this page twice to cover all 14 days

One honest week of notes will teach you more than a month of guessing. Two weeks will show you real patterns. **Print this page twice** — label one copy Week 1 and the other Week 2.

How to use it: fill in one row each morning, within an hour of waking. Rough estimates are perfect — never watch the clock during the night to be "accurate." The pattern matters, not the precision. For your first week, change nothing about your sleep; just record.

Week of:

Date	Bedtime	Time to fall asleep (est.)	Night wakings (how many)	Wake time	Rested? (1-5)	Notes (caffeine, stress, exercise, late screen...)

Restedness scale: 1 = running on empty · 2 = dragging · 3 = okay · 4 = good · 5 = genuinely refreshed

No grades here. A diary full of rough nights is not failure — it is exactly the information that makes the rest of this pack work. And if you ever see a professional about your sleep, a completed two-week diary is the first thing they will wish you had.

My Wind-Down Routine Builder

Give your brain a runway, not a cliff

Bodies do not have an off switch — they have a dimmer. Going straight from emails, chores, or bright screens into bed asks your brain to do the impossible. A 30-60 minute wind-down routine is the runway that lets sleep come in for a smooth landing.

Step 1: check every activity below that appeals to you. **Step 2:** build your own routine at the bottom. Keep it simple — three to five steps, same order each night. Boring, repeated, and predictable is exactly the point.

Screens off

- ☐ Set a nightly "screens off" alarm about an hour before bed
- ☐ Charge my phone outside the bedroom (or at least across the room)
- ☐ Trade late-night scrolling for one of the activities below
- ☐ Switch from overhead lights to low lamps for the last hour

Body

- ☐ A warm shower or bath (the cool-down afterward invites sleepiness)
- ☐ Five to ten minutes of gentle stretching
- ☐ Brush teeth and wash up *early*, so tiredness can't talk me out of it
- ☐ A warm, caffeine-free drink, sipped slowly

Mind

- ☐ Read a paper book (nothing too gripping)
- ☐ Listen to a calm audiobook, podcast, or quiet music
- ☐ Fill in the Racing Thoughts Dump page from this pack
- ☐ A quiet hobby: light puzzle, sketching, knitting
- ☐ Slow breathing or one of the wind-down cards from this pack

Environment

- ☐ Dim the lights through the whole home, not just the bedroom
- ☐ Set out tomorrow's launch pad — clothes, bag, keys — so my brain can let go of it
- ☐ Cool the bedroom and close the curtains
- ☐ Get quiet ready: earplugs, fan, or steady background sound

My routine, step by step

About 60 minutes before bed, I will:

About 30 minutes before bed, I will:

Once I'm in bed, I will:

Tip box: "Your routine is a signal, not a performance. Done imperfectly every night beats done perfectly twice a week."

Racing Thoughts Dump

Get it out of your head and onto the page

Your brain treats unfinished business as too important to forget — so it rehearses it, usually the moment your head hits the pillow. Writing things down changes that. Once a thought is safely captured on paper, your brain can finally put it down for the night.

How to use it: fill this in during your wind-down routine — at a table or in a chair, not in bed. Empty everything: tasks, conversations, worries, ideas, the email you forgot. Then give each item its first small step for tomorrow. Print a fresh copy whenever your evening brain is busy.

Two columns side by side, each with 6 blank lines:

Left column — "What's on my mind tonight"

Right column — "My first small step tomorrow"

The parking lot

Some worries have no next step — they are about things you cannot control tonight (or maybe at all). Those don't need a plan. They need a parking spot.

Worries I can't control tonight — I'm parking them here:

If a thought shows up in bed anyway, you don't have to argue with it. Just remind yourself: 'It's on the page. It can wait for daylight.' Then let your attention drift back to your breath.

Caffeine, Alcohol & Screen Tracker

The afternoon and evening choices that quietly shape your night

Three everyday habits have an outsized say in how you sleep:

- **Caffeine** can stay active in your body for six to ten hours — long after the buzz fades.
- **Alcohol** can make you drowsy at first, but it fragments the second half of the night, causing light, broken sleep and early waking.
- **Bright screens late in the evening** push your body clock later and keep your mind switched on.

None of this means "never." It means **timing matters** — and one honest week of tracking will show you *your* timing. Fill in one row each evening (or the next morning), then add your restedness score after you wake.

Day	Last caffeine (time)	Alcohol? (y/n + how much)	Screens off (time)	Lights out (time)	Rested next morning (1-5)

What the week showed me

My best mornings followed evenings where I:

One timing change I want to test next week:

Look for pairs: a late coffee and a 2 a.m. ceiling-stare, a nightcap and a 4 a.m. wake-up. When you can see the pair, the choice gets much easier.

Bedroom Environment Checklist

Let your room do some of the work

All night long, your bedroom sends signals to your brain: light or dark, noisy or calm, alert or at ease. Most of these signals can be improved in an evening, for little or no money. Walk through your room with this list and check everything that is **already true**. Whatever is left unchecked is your menu of easy wins.

Light

- ☐ The room is dark enough at night that I couldn't easily read a book
- ☐ Curtains or blinds block outside light (or I have a comfortable sleep mask)
- ☐ Little standby and charger lights are covered, dimmed, or off
- ☐ I have a low, warm light I can use at night without waking myself fully

Sound

- ☐ Sudden noises are softened — earplugs, a fan, or steady background sound
- ☐ My phone is on do-not-disturb overnight
- ☐ I've worked out a plan for the noises that wake me (pets, partner's alarm, the street)

Temperature

- ☐ The room runs on the cool side at night — cooler than daytime comfort
- ☐ My bedding matches the season (breathable when warm, cozy when cold)
- ☐ Cold feet are handled — warm socks are allowed and effective

Comfort

- ☐ My pillow keeps my neck level — not propped up, not sagging
- ☐ My mattress isn't leaving me stiff or sore in the morning
- ☐ My bedding is clean and actually feels good against my skin

Tech

- ☐ My phone charges out of arm's reach (or outside the room entirely)
- ☐ I don't fall asleep to a TV — or if I do, it has a sleep timer
- ☐ Any clock face is turned away so I can't check the time at night

3 changes I'll make this week

1.

2.

3.

Tip box: "Start with light and the clock. Darkness is the strongest sleep signal there is — and a hidden clock face ends the 3 a.m. math sessions for good."

My "If I Can't Sleep" Plan

Decide now, so 3 a.m. you doesn't have to

The middle of the night is the worst possible time to make decisions. Your thinking brain is half offline, frustration is loud, and the clock feels like an enemy. So we plan now, in daylight, while you are calm. When a sleepless stretch comes, you won't have to think — you'll just follow your own instructions.

The plan

1. **Notice, don't clock-watch.** If it *feels* like you've been awake around 20 minutes or more — or you're getting tense and frustrated — that's your cue. Estimate; never check the time.
2. **Get up and go to my spot.** Out of bed, lights low. This is not punishment. You are protecting the bed = sleep link.
3. **Do something calm and boring.** No screens, no snacks, no chores that wake you up, no "just checking" anything.
4. **Return when sleepy — not just tired.** Heavy eyelids, drifting thoughts, head-nodding: that's your ticket back to bed.
5. **Repeat if needed.** Twice in one night is not failing — it is training. Every round strengthens the lesson: bed is where sleep happens.

Low-light, boring activity ideas

- ☐ Read a paper book — something pleasant but not gripping
- ☐ Listen to a calm audiobook, quiet music, or a dull podcast
- ☐ Do one of the wind-down cards from this pack
- ☐ Slow breathing in a comfortable chair
- ☐ Fold laundry, sort something small, page through a magazine

My plan, filled in

My chosen activity will be:

My chair / spot outside of bed:

My phrase for the hard moments:

Phrase ideas: "Rest still counts." · "I've had hard nights before; sleepiness always comes back." · "I'm training, not failing."

Getting out of bed to sleep better sounds backwards — but it is one of the most tested and trusted habits in all of sleep research. It works because your bed stays what it should be: the place where sleep lives.

Sleepy-Time Wind-Down Cards

Cut them out. Keep one on the nightstand.

Six quiet practices, each taking about two to five minutes. Use them during your wind-down routine, in bed with the lights low, or at your "If I Can't Sleep" spot. Cut along the dashed lines and keep your favorites where your evenings happen.

"Slow the breath. Breathe in through your nose for a gentle count of 4. Pause softly. Breathe out for a slow count of 8, like fogging a mirror. Let every exhale sink you deeper into the mattress. Repeat 10 times."

"Body scan. Start at your toes. Notice them, soften them. Move slowly upward — feet, calves, knees, hips, belly, chest, hands, shoulders, jaw, forehead. Wherever you find gripping, let it melt by ten percent. No rush. No finish line."

"Three good moments. Recall three small, pleasant moments from today — a taste, a laugh, a door held open, warm water on your hands. Replay each one slowly, like a short film. Let the day end on what went right."

"Unclench check. Ask yourself three questions: Is my jaw loose? Are my shoulders down, away from my ears? Are my hands open? Fix each one you find, then take one slow breath for each. Repeat once."

"A quiet place. Picture somewhere calm and safe — real or invented. Walk through it slowly. What do you see? What do you hear? What does the air feel like? Add one small detail at a time, until the scene is more interesting than your thoughts."

"Rest still counts. If sleep won't come, stop chasing it. Lie comfortably, close your eyes, and simply rest — warm, still, breathing slowly. Quiet rest restores you too. And sleep arrives sooner when nobody is chasing it."

Cut along the dashed lines.

Morning Review

Two quiet minutes before the day begins

Mornings hold the freshest information about your nights. This quick check-in takes about two minutes with your coffee or tea — and over a week, it quietly reveals what actually helps you sleep. Print a copy for each day, or keep a small stack by your kettle.

Date:

Last night in one word:

How rested do I feel? (circle one): 1 2 3 4 5

What helped last night, even a little:

What got in the way:

One thing I'll repeat tonight:

Morning anchors — done today

- ☐ Up at (or near) my set wake time
- ☐ Daylight within the first hour
- ☐ Sleep diary row filled in

Judge the week, never the night. One rough night after three good ones is not a setback — it's just a night. Your trend line is the truth.

Weekly Sleep Review

After each diary week, zoom out

Once a week, sit down with your completed diary page and look for the story it tells. This is where scattered nights turn into patterns — and patterns are what you can actually change. Print a fresh copy after each diary week.

Week of:

The numbers

My average restedness this week (1-5):

Nights I fell asleep within about 30 minutes:

Nights I used my 'If I Can't Sleep' plan instead of lying awake:

The patterns

Looking at my best and worst nights — what happened in the hours before each?

What I'll keep doing:

What I'll change or try next week (one or two things only):

One kind sentence to myself about this week:

Better sleep shows up as better weeks, not perfect nights. And if several rough weeks stack up despite your honest effort, that is useful information too — see 'When Sleep Needs More Than Habits' in this pack.

When Sleep Needs More Than Habits

Knowing when to ask for help is a sleep skill too

The habits in this pack genuinely help most people sleep better. But some sleep problems have causes that no routine or checklist can reach — and the encouraging truth is that these are usually *very* treatable. They just need a professional's eyes. Reaching out is not giving up on your progress; it is adding a stronger tool to your kit.

Consider talking with a healthcare provider if any of these sound familiar

- **Loud snoring, gasping, or pauses in breathing during sleep** (often noticed by a partner), morning headaches, or heavy daytime sleepiness even after a full night in bed. These can be signs of a breathing-related sleep problem — very common, and very treatable once identified.
- **Trouble falling or staying asleep three or more nights a week, for three months or longer**, especially when it drags down your days. Long-running sleeplessness deserves real support, and effective, well-studied programs exist — delivered by trained professionals.
- **Crawling, tingling, or "I have to move" feelings in your legs** in the evening or at night, eased by movement. This has a name, and it has treatments.
- **Sleepiness that intrudes on your days** — nodding off in conversations, at your desk, or (most importantly) while driving. If drowsiness ever affects your driving, please mention it to your provider soon. It matters.
- **Questions about sleep medications or supplements** — starting, stopping, or mixing them. Never stop a prescribed medication on your own; your provider can help you do it safely.
- **Sleep that changed noticeably** after a new medication, a health condition, pregnancy, or a shift-work schedule.
- **Low mood, heavy worry, or dark thoughts riding along with the sleepless nights.** Sleep and mood are close companions — helping one often helps the other, and you deserve support for both.

What to bring to the appointment

Your completed sleep diary. Truly — two filled-in weeks from this pack is exactly what sleep professionals wish every patient brought. It turns "I sleep terribly" into a clear picture they can act on.

Asking for help with sleep is like asking a mechanic about a noise you can't place — sensible, ordinary, and much better done early. You are not failing at sleep. You are being thorough about it.

Rest Is a Practice

You made it to the last page — which means you now know more about how your sleep works than most people ever learn.

Here is the heart of it all: sleep is not a performance to perfect. It is a relationship to rebuild. Some nights will be deep and easy. Some will be restless for no reason you can find. Both are part of a normal human sleep life. What changes everything is the *pattern* — the steady wake time, the unhurried wind-down, the bed kept sacred for sleep, the morning light on your face.

Keep the pages that pull their weight. Reprint the diary when you drift. Return to the night plan whenever 3 a.m. gets loud again. The tool you keep coming back to is the one that is working.

And on the hard nights, remember the words from your own plan: **rest still counts**. A warm, quiet, resting body is doing real repair, even before sleep arrives. You do not have to try harder tonight. You only have to make room — and let sleep do what it has always known how to do.

Sleep well. You've earned the practice.

Please Read: Important Information

About this toolkit

This toolkit is an educational self-help resource. It shares general, widely published information about sleep habits, along with calming skills for winding down at night.

It is not medical care, psychotherapy, counselling, or mental health treatment, and it is not a program for treating insomnia or any sleep disorder. Using this toolkit does not create a professional relationship of any kind with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

Everyone's sleep is different. If sleep problems are persistent, severe, or affecting your days — or if you notice possible signs of a sleep disorder such as loud snoring with pauses in breathing, restless legs, or ongoing insomnia — please talk with a healthcare provider. Bring your completed sleep diary; it will help.

A few specific cautions: never stop or change a prescribed medication (including sleep medication) without talking to your provider. If daytime sleepiness ever affects your driving or safety at work, treat that as urgent and seek medical advice promptly. If any exercise in this pack feels distressing, stop and consider speaking with a professional.

If you need help now

Sleepless nights and dark thoughts sometimes travel together. If you are lying awake with thoughts of hopelessness or self-harm, please do not carry that alone — support is available right now, at any hour.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call 988** — free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Text 988** — if you prefer texting to talking

Additional support:

- **United States — Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741 (24/7)
- **Canada — Kids Help Phone (ages 5-29):** call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out. If the nights feel heavy, these services are there for you.

You matter. Your rest matters. And support is available.

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