

How to Become a Morning Person

Can a night owl become a morning person? Follow our very own staffer as she learns how to sleep better and love waking up in the mornings.

By Bethany Gumper

From Snooze-Button Addict to Morning Person

I have always wanted to be one of those women who jump out of bed and into a pair of [running shoes](#) at 7 a.m. What an amazing feeling: to stroll into work after a three-mile jog, a Spinning class, or a series of sun salutations. I wouldn't know.

"Um, really?" my husband asks on Monday night when I tell him I'm going to the gym the next morning at seven. Why the skepticism? He shoots me a knowing look.

Tuesday

7:00 a.m. Alarm blares. Ugh, I should get up.

SNOOZE

7:15 a.m. My gym clothes are right there! I laid them out on my chair last night!

SNOOZE

7:30 a.m. I should at least get up and do a workout DVD.

SNOOZE

7:45 a.m. Too late to work out; might as well cozy up and sleep some more.

SNOOZE

8:00 a.m. Now I have to get up or else I'll be late.

Clearly my morning sluggishness is cramping my workout style. But can I change my night-owl ways? Because I've snoozed through the better part of three decades, I'm pretty sure I'm just inherently lazy. But I'm determined to try, so I call in the troops: the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. After I tell them about my mission to get more out of my mornings, they set me up with my very own sleep guru, Colette Haward, MD, a psychiatrist in New York City. At our first meeting, my future as an early riser looks bright. "There's a genetic component to your circadian clock. But for many people, behavioral changes make a big difference," Dr. Haward says. She tells me that it typically takes a few weeks to get on a better sleep schedule. I'm yawning already.

Bypassing the Snooze Button

On any given day, I hit the darn snoozer anywhere from three to six times. What's the big deal? Turns out, besides robbing myself of 30 to 60 minutes of sleep, I'm messing with my system. "It generally takes about an hour to reach deep, restorative sleep. Your fragmented morning dozing actually leaves you more tired," Dr. Haward explains.

My Bedtime Story

Breaking up with Snooze is hard to do. Beep, beep! I want to throw the alarm clock across the room, but I can't, because Dr. Haward told me to put it in the living room. So I have to leave my comfortable bed to turn it off (well played, sleep doctor!). I stumble to the bathroom, splash some cold water on my face, clip the leash onto my dog, Theodore, and stagger out the door. "Go outside and take a walk right when you get up," I recall Dr. Haward telling me. "Bright light suppresses sleep-inducing melatonin." It works; 10 minutes later I feel surprisingly alert. Lesson learned: Once I'm out among the living, I'm fine. But how the heck do I crawl out from under those covers smiling instead of swearing?

Next morning I try an alarm clock that eases me into reality. The BlueMax Sunrise System Model 320 (\$129, fullspectrum.com) grows progressively brighter as 7:30 a.m. nears. "Graduating-light alarm clocks are effective, especially during winter, when mornings are dark," Dr. Breus says. When I open my eyes, my mood is a little brighter too (although I would still rather go back to sleep).

On day three, I sweeten the deal with a get-up incentive. If I wake on time, I get to watch my fave show on TiVo after Theodore's walk (a stop at your favorite coffee shop or breakfast with a pal would also work). My oatmeal is a riot with Tina Fey and Alec Baldwin, and afterward I'm positively cheerful on the subway.

I experience a breakthrough a week later. My early-rising friend Carolina asks me to meet her at the park for a 7:45 a.m. doggie playdate. I'm pretty sure she thought I would say no on a Saturday, but I rise to the challenge. As soon as I step outside, I'm smiling. The sky seems bluer, my down parka feels cozier; I am in love with the morning! When I run into another friend at the park, she nearly falls over and asks, "What are you doing up so early?"

Status Check

Ever since I discovered my inner morning person, I wake up at five every day. Just kidding. But it's way easier to get out of bed most of the time. The night after my two-week experiment ended, I decided to tempt fate and not set the 7:30 alarm. I awoke at a perfectly respectable 8:00! Now I'm typically up and moving at 7:30 on weekdays and 8:30 on weekends. My energy has increased, I no longer doze off on the subway in the morning, I'm in a better mood, and I've even dropped a few pounds, thanks to my new morning [running routine](#).

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