01-20-17 | WORK SMART

How I Trained Myself To Wake Up On Time Without An Alarm

Half the battle is figuring out how much sleep your body needs, and the other half is consistency.

[PHOTO: JOSH FELISE VIA UNSPLASH]

BY HAILLEY GRIFFIS
6 MINUTE READ

Sleep is one of my favorite things. I adore it. I've never been one for alarms, though. Potentially because they mark the end of my sleeping.

I started working remotely a few years ago, and intermittently went between working from home and working at an office. Having a more flexible schedule meant I didn't need to wake up at a certain time unless there was a meeting. Because of this, I've experimented with eliminating my morning alarm from my life. Here's how I went about it, and how you can, too.

SLEEP AFFECTS MORE THAN YOUR DAILY COFFEE INTAKE

I'm all aboard Arianna Huffington's sleep train and am sure to get eight hours a night. I've read so many articles that explain how to make sure your alarm wakes you up. I remember in high school placing the alarm all the way across my room to make myself have to physically get out of bed to shut it off.

Once you figure out where your body is on the sleep scale, it becomes a lot easier to know when to go to sleep.

In university, I crammed so much into my schedule that sometimes I only slept five hours then tried to nap during the day. I obsessed over different sleep cycles to see if there was a more efficient way to do this sleep thing than powering off for eight hours straight. (I didn't get around to really making the shift, but it's an interesting take on sleep cycles if you're keen to keep reading.)

your movement and sleep.

I started tracking my sleep and movement a few years ago and at the time realized that seven hours and 45 minutes of sleep had me at the perfect amount for the day, but anything past eight and a half hours and I would keep wanting to sleep.

Everyone's optimal amount of sleep will be a little different. For guidance, the National Sleep Foundation states that people between the ages of 18–64 need anywhere from seven to nine hours of sleep a night.

[IMAGE: VIA NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION]

Short of science and tracking, you can also do this on more of a feel basis. Ask yourself:

- How you feel when you wake up?

- How many hours of sleep did you get?

- What amount of sleep feels like enough?

Once you figure out where your body is on the sleep scale, it becomes a lot easier to know when to go to sleep so you can wake up on time.

STEP 2: WAKING UP IS REALLY ABOUT GOING TO SLEEP

What time do you usually wake up?

I am usually keen on getting up early, at around 6 or 6:30 a.m., but what I didn't adjust in the past was *when* I went to sleep. I decided that my deadline for waking up would stay firm, but that my deadline for going to sleep would be more flexible. In retrospect, this doesn't really make much sense.

Waking up is really about going to sleep at the right time. Once you've learned how much sleep your body needs, it's easy to do the math to figure out when you might want to start thinking about heading to bed. For me personally, that's at around 10 p.m. so I can be up at about 6 a.m. naturally. So I make sure to close up electronics and start to wind down about 30 minutes before I head to bed.

The latest clock update for iPhone also has a Bedtime feature that can remind you at 30 minutes . . . before you go to sleep.

Studies have shown that checking your phone before bed and ultimately stressing your eyes with too much light can have negative impacts on how you sleep.

"People are exposing their eyes to this stream of photons from these objects that basically tell your brain stay awake, it's not time to go to sleep yet," Dan Siegel, clinical professor of psychology at the University of California Los Angeles, told *Business Insider*.

The latest clock update for iPhone also has a Bedtime feature that can remind you at 30 minutes (or however long you think is best) before you go to sleep. It could almost end up being a "reverse alarm," an evening alarm but without a morning alarm. Setting a specific sleep routine that involves shutting off electronics and relaxing can help prepare your body to wind down properly.

STEP 3: LISTENING TO YOUR BODY AND KEEPING CONSISTENT

I've learned to trust my body when I wake up. Not to pay attention to the time and decide if it's too early to be awake, but to ask myself how I feel when I first wake up to make sure I got enough sleep.

Consistency is the key to all of this. Our bodies are creatures of habit.

I found though, that after analyzing how much sleep I really needed, I would generally wake up at the eight-hour mark–if I go to sleep at 10:30 p.m., that means waking up 6:30 a.m. I would then set my alarm to 7:30 a.m. (depending on the day), but found more regularly I would wake up right around 6:30 a.m.

Weekends are another great one to keep in mind. I've read in a few places that it's healthy to get the same amount of sleep every night, and keep a consistent pattern.

One Northwestern University study found that going to sleep at the same time every night could lower the risk of heart attacks. And Stanford researchers have claimed that keeping regular sleep hours will help you be more alert when you wake up and manage your time better.

Consistency is the key to all of this. Our bodies are creatures of habit, and if we train them to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, they will make it happen. But consistency is easier said then done. Outside of our control, there are things like daylight savings, holidays, evening celebrations, and so on. Flexibility is key as well. Full-time consistency in anything is a challenge, so instead I look at it as more of a goal to live 90% of the time without an alarm than to do so 100% of the time.

That means that my schedule sometimes shifts around the holidays, and if there's something I really can't miss, I'll go back to using an alarm. All it takes to go back to living alarm-free for me is going to sleep at a regular time a few days in a row, and then I'm reset.

A final note: I've always used my iPhone as my morning alarm, so the added benefit of *not* doing that is that I don't look at my phone first thing in the morning. I now keep my phone in another part of my home. I've also been limiting the amount of notifications I get in order to try and remedy this, but it can be tough when I want to keep on Slack notifications, for example, and my team all works in different time zones.

That's a minor hiccup, though. And so far, all signs point to a well-slept future that's finally rid of alarm clocks.

A version of this article originally appeared on Buffer. It is adapted and reprinted with permission.

You Might Also Like:

This home designed for four generations is a glimpse at the future of housing

8 female executives on the habits they gave up

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

SIGN UP

See All Newsletters

Fast Company Top Articles:

▶

FOLLOW

IMPACT

IMPACT

This free online class will teach anyone how to solve societal problems

IMPACT

Once we have lab-grown meat, will we still need animal advocacy?

IMPACT

This startup lets you rent a backyard office from your neighbor

NEWS

NEWS

Save local restaurants. Order more damn takeout!

NEWS

Biden stimulus checks update: What the GOP compromise plan could mean for third payments

NEWS

91 movies and TV shows to stream for Black History Month