

The Rhythm is Gonna Get Ya

I have a friend, let's call her 'Sarah,' who seemed to live in a constant state of "time-travel." Working rotating shifts at a busy hospital, her life was a series of hilarious, yet exhausting, mix-ups. She once tried to order a pepperoni pizza at 7:00 AM. On another occasion, she walked into a grocery store in her pajamas, genuinely confused as to why everyone else was buying cereal while she was hunting for steak and a bottle of red wine. Sarah wasn't disorganized; her internal clock was simply operating in a different time zone than her body.

Your internal clock is known as your circadian rhythm. Think of your body as a finely tuned orchestra where every instrument, from your heart rate to your hormones, needs to play in sync. The orchestra is conducted by a tiny region in the brain that regulates our bodies' 24-hour internal schedule. Due to our biological makeup, we are designed to be active during the day, and restful at night. When the sun rises, light signals the body to stop producing melatonin and start pumping out cortisol to get you moving¹. Working at night means asking your body to be alert while your circadian rhythm signals that it's time for sleep. Conversely, trying to sleep during the day requires you to fight against sunlight and noise, which tell your brain to wake up. This mismatch can be challenging; so difficult in fact, that some individuals develop Shift Work Sleep Disorder (SWSD). SWSD is characterized by excessive sleepiness during work, or severe insomnia when trying to rest. It represents a biological "mismatch" where your internal hormones are out of sync with the clock on the wall.

Managing this requires a concerted effort on your part, along with a little bit of good fortune, too. Light is your most powerful tool; you should seek bright light at work but wear dark sunglasses on the drive home to prevent the morning sun from resetting your clock prematurely. To create an optimal sleep environment

at home, use blackout curtains to darken your room. And consistency is key, so aim to maintain a regular sleep schedule even on your days off. Taking short strategic naps before a shift can help, as well as timing your caffeine intake to end at least six hours before you head to bed.

By taking these steps, you can help your body find a workable rhythm even when the sun says otherwise. So, take a page out of Sarah's book; respect your circadian rhythm, dim the lights when the world gets bright, maintain good sleep hygiene, and strategically use food, exercise and caffeine to support your health, particularly at times that best support your work and sleep schedules. Remember, when your body is out of sync with the sun, don't let the rhythm get ya!



¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12651070/>, *Melatonin and Cortisol Suppression and Circadian Rhythm Disruption in Burnout Among Healthcare*

Professionals: A Systematic Review, National Institutes of Health, National Center for Biotechnology Information, October 29, 2025.