

NORTH EAST CLINICAL

# SLEEP AFTERCARE GUIDE



## REBUILDING REST, RHYTHM, AND NERVOUS SYSTEM REPAIR

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# Introduction: Why Sleep Matters for Wellbeing

Sleep is one of the most powerful and accessible tools for healing. During sleep, the brain processes emotions, consolidates memory, and performs deep physical repair.

Quality sleep supports immune function, mental clarity, hormone balance, and emotional regulation — all essential for recovery after intense experiences or ongoing stress.

Yet sleep is often disrupted when we need it most. This guide helps rebuild a healthy relationship with rest, offering practices that support your body's natural rhythm without pressure or perfectionism.





# THE PHYSIOLOGY OF REST



Sleep is when your body switches fully into parasympathetic mode — the "rest and restore" system. Key healing processes that occur during sleep include:

- Memory & emotional processing during REM sleep
- Immune repair, muscle healing, and hormone regulation during deep (slow-wave) sleep
- Stress recovery through lowered cortisol and stabilized blood pressure
- Neuroplasticity and improved learning

Disrupted or insufficient sleep can increase anxiety, fatigue, pain sensitivity, and emotional overwhelm. Prioritizing rest is not indulgent — it's essential.

## What Is the Circadian Rhythm?

Your circadian rhythm is your body's internal clock — a roughly 24-hour cycle that tells you when to feel awake and when to feel sleepy. It's guided by light exposure, movement, meals, temperature, and routine.

This rhythm regulates:

- Sleep and wake timing
- Hormone release (like melatonin and cortisol)
- Body temperature
- Digestion and energy levels

When your circadian rhythm is steady, falling asleep and waking up is natural and easier. When it's disrupted — by stress, irregular schedules, screen exposure at night, or lack of morning light — it can be harder to feel tired at night or alert in the morning.



# FOUNDATIONS OF BETTER SLEEP

## 1. Rhythm is More Important Than Perfection

The body thrives on consistency. Aim to go to bed and wake up around the same time daily — even on weekends. This helps reset your internal clock (circadian rhythm), making sleep more reliable over time.

**Tip:** Build a wind-down routine you can look forward to, even 10–20 mins helps.

## 2. Light and Dark as Sleep Cues

Your brain uses light exposure to time your sleep-wake cycle.

- Daylight helps anchor your circadian rhythm and improve mood.
- Dim evening lighting signals the body to begin melatonin production.

**Try this:** Get 5–15 minutes of natural light in the morning. In the evening, use warm-toned lights or candles if possible.

## 3. Nervous System Soothing Before Bed

Practices that calm the body and mind help prepare for sleep.

- Slow, deep breathing
- Gentle stretching or a warm shower
- Herbal teas (chamomile, lemon balm, valerian)
- Soothing rituals (brushing hair, reading fiction, tidying)

**Tip:** Avoid stimulating content or emotional conversations before bed.

### Support Your Rhythm With:

- Morning light (natural light within 1–2 hours of waking)
- Consistent sleep/wake times (even on weekends)
- Regular meals (eating at roughly the same time helps set body clocks)
- Reduced bright light in the evening (especially blue light from screens)
- Think of your circadian rhythm like a plant following the sun — it needs regular signals to stay healthy and aligned.



# MAKE A SLEEPY TIME TEA

- 1 tsp dried chamomile
- 1 tsp dried lemon balm
- ½ tsp dried lavender (optional)

**Optional:** a pinch of valerian root or oat straw for deeper sedation

1. Combine herbs in a teapot or infuser.
2. Pour over just-boiled water. Steep for 5–10 minutes.
3. Sip slowly before bed in a calm space.

**Tip:** Make a week's worth of the dry blend and store in a jar.

## Soothing Stomach & Nervous System Blend

For when restlessness is tied to tension in the gut or emotional unease.

- 1 tsp dried chamomile
- 1 tsp dried fennel seeds
- 1 tsp dried peppermint

**Optional:** a few slices of fresh ginger for warmth

This blend eases digestion and settles the body's "second brain" — the gut.

## Grounding & Grief-Support Blend

For when sleep is disrupted by emotional heaviness, grief, or over-processing.

- 1 tsp dried oatstraw (nourishes the nervous system)
- 1 tsp dried rose petals (emotional heart support)
- ½ tsp dried skullcap or passionflower (mild sedative properties)
- Optional: a touch of honey

Rose adds emotional softness, while oatstraw soothes frazzled nerves gently over time.





## WIND-DOWN JOURNALLING

Use to reflect, release, and prepare your mind for rest. Choose one each evening — no need to answer all at once.

### Letting Go & Releasing

- What can I leave in today that doesn't need to follow me into tomorrow?
- What am I ready to hand over to rest?

### Hope & Forward Focus

- What small thing am I looking forward to?
- What does a gentle tomorrow look like?

### Clearing the Mind

- What's looping in my mind right now? Can I write it down and let it be for now?
- If I wake in the night, what kind words do I want to remember?

**Tip:** Keep a notepad by your bed to make notes to clear the mind.



## GUIDED SLEEP PRACTICES

Shift from alertness to rest.

### 4-7-8 Breathing

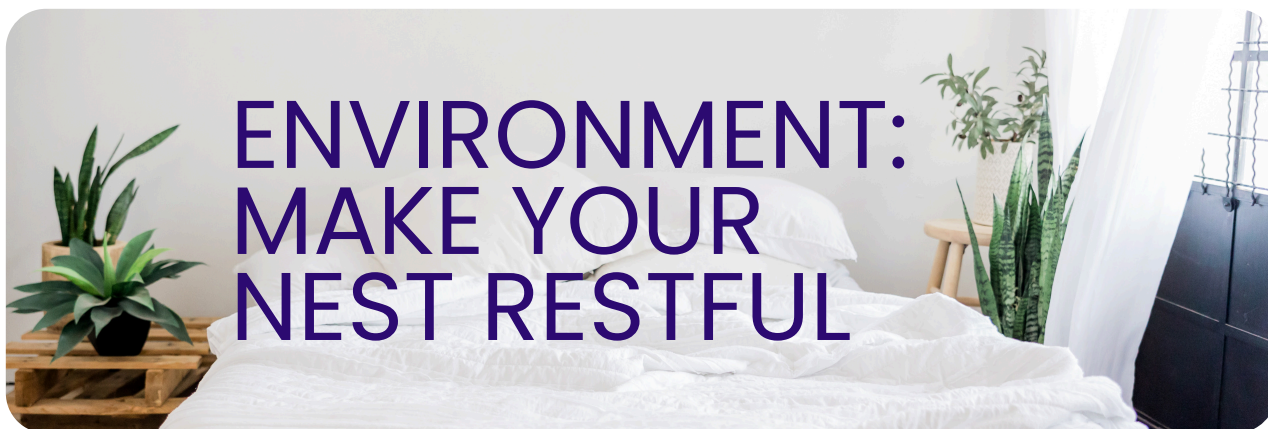
- Inhale through the nose for 4 counts
- Hold for 7 counts
- Exhale slowly through the mouth for 8 counts
- Repeat 4 rounds, then return to normal breathing

This elongates your exhale, relaxing the vagus nerve and slowing heart rate.

### Body Scan for Sleep

- Lie down and gently scan from toes to head. For each body part, say:
- "I feel my toes. My toes are heavy. My toes are resting."
- Let each area soften before moving on.

The body begins to associate awareness with relaxation instead of alertness.



## Core Principles of Sleep Hygiene

### 1. Keep it cool and dark

Your body temperature needs to drop slightly to initiate sleep. A cool room (ideally 16–19°C / 60–67°F) mimics the natural dip that helps induce deeper rest. Darkness helps trigger melatonin, your brain's sleep hormone.

**Try:** blackout curtains, eye mask, or switching off bright lights 1 hr before bed.

### 2. Make your bed a resting place

Reserve your bed for sleep and comfort only — not for scrolling, worrying, or working. Over time, your body associates the bed with rest rather than activity.

**Tip:** A consistent cue like a certain pillow, blanket, or scent can reinforce the message: "this is where we rest."

### 3. Limit stimulating input

Bright lights, noise, news, and emotionally charged conversations can keep the nervous system on alert. Aim to reduce stimulation in the hour before bed.

**Try:** no phones in bed, or switching to "night mode" and "do-not-disturb".

### 4. Use calming sensory cues

Soothing scents, soft fabrics, and dim lighting help communicate safety. Essential oils like lavender, cedarwood and chamomile can support parasympathetic activation — the rest and digest state.

**Try:** a drop of essential oil on a tissue near your pillow, a warm bath, or brushing your hair gently before sleep.

### 5. Declutter your sleep space

You don't need a perfect room — just one where you can relax. If it feels chaotic, tidy one small surface to create a "calm corner" where your eyes can rest.

**Try:** a small basket or tray for bedtime items (journal, tea, hand cream, etc.) so your bedtime routine feels deliberate and cozy.



## 6. Reduce noise or create soothing background sound

For light sleepers or those sensitive to noise, even distant sounds can keep the nervous system slightly alert. Consider:

- White or pink noise
- Nature sounds (ocean, forest, rain)
- A quiet fan
- Gentle music or a calm voice

**Tip:** If silence feels unsettling, use sound as a buffer, just be sure it fades gently.

## 7. Keep sleep helpers close, but pressure low

Keep helpful items nearby (herbal tea, eye mask, journal), but avoid needing a perfect ritual to sleep. Flexibility matters — the goal is support.

# WIND-DOWN CORNER: BUILD A SLEEP SANCTUARY

Even if your space is shared or limited, you can create a tiny “sleep sanctuary.”

### Try collecting:

A soft light (lamp or salt rock)

One calming scent (essential oil or herbal sachet)

A soothing object (stone, worry doll, soft cloth)

Your journal or book

A sleep tea or water glass

Place together in a way that visually signals “this is my space to slow down.”  
Over time, your brain starts to associate this area with the permission to rest.

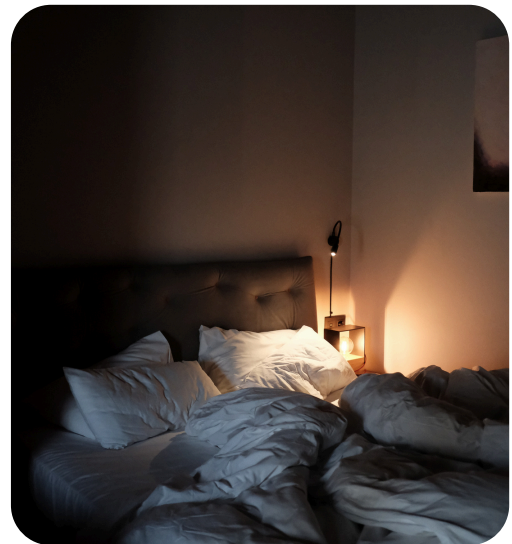


## IF SLEEP DOESN'T COME

Sometimes, the pressure to sleep becomes its own barrier. If you're lying awake:

- Get up and do something quiet in low light — reading, stretching, sipping tea.
- Use gentle affirmations like: "Rest is enough. My body knows what to do."  
"I'm safe, even if I'm not asleep yet."

Focus on rest over sleep — the body still benefits from calm stillness.



## WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

If sleep problems are persistent, disruptive, or beginning to affect your daily life, it's a good idea to seek support. Consult a GP, therapist, or sleep specialist if:

- You're regularly lying awake for hours, even when tired
- You experience frequent nightmares, night terrors, or sleepwalking
- You feel anxious or fearful about going to sleep
- Your sleep is very light, broken, or leaves you feeling unrefreshed every day
- You rely on alcohol, sedatives, or recreational drugs to fall asleep
- You experience snoring, choking, gasping, or stop breathing during sleep
- You have fatigue, mood swings, or memory problems due to poor sleep
- Your issues have lasted longer than 4 weeks, even with lifestyle changes







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