

WORK LESS AND LEARN MORE

I often get questions about this with strength, rest and sleep. Many students feel that they have to work pretty much 24/7 in order to keep up. They are worried about missing something, if they do something other than reading. They work until late at night and fall into bed.

Others find it difficult to get started with studies in the evening. Goes and pulls a leg, lazily watches TV, games. Some does something practical like washing or baking, or some other activity they imagine is important. Once they start reading, it can drag on late into the night.

Both groups sleep restlessly, are often tired and tense during the day. At some lecture with a slow pace, the attention drops, the head nods and a memory gap was created.

Perhaps there is a Lutheran work ideal that haunts these guys. Working less and allowing time for the brain and body to recover makes it easier for you to learn afterwards.

A lot of what I cover here is very simple: you've probably seen most of it before. However, I ask you to read the article with curious eyes and ask yourself: am I following this pattern? Can I change to something presented here? Too often we live casually.

Fatigue and Drugs

Let's establish: Fatigue is not a deficiency disease for coffee or any other drug. I read an article about a chemical that French researchers had found, which allowed the body to be alert during some nights, for example during exam reading or driving. The drug would not have any of the side effects that other drugs have which produce the same effect, e.g. coffee and amphetamines. I myself am very skeptical about drugs. I tried amphetamines during a short period of math studies. Sure, I was very alert, but when the drug stopped working, it was like a club blow to the head and I had to sleep for 12 hours. Half a year later, I learned methods for relaxation, self-hypnosis and then later zenmeditation and noticed that I got the same alertness in my body by my own power. I was in control of my wakefulness without the drug.

Fatigue is a signal from the body and brain that rest and inner integration are needed. In all contexts, it is important to strive to live in harmony with one's biological rhythm. If you do that, you can accomplish great things. If you try to counteract, your body has to work both with what you want to work with and against your "poison". It will be a two-front battle.

My advice to all students I meet is to find their biological rhythm and live in that rhythm. Let me first briefly describe the main features of this rhythm and then give some tips on practical exercises.

Sleep cycles

It is quite simple to arrange for your best sleep. There are many books about sleep mechanisms. I found early a good one by a french author Pierre Fluchaire, who in several books and TV programs has described how to get a good and nourishing rest and sleep.

Later research shows that what he presents is largely applicable to most people. It is good to start with this model and then use what works for you and adapt.

In fact, man is actually a biochemical process industry. As such, humans thrive best with a regular rhythm and we have several biorhythms.

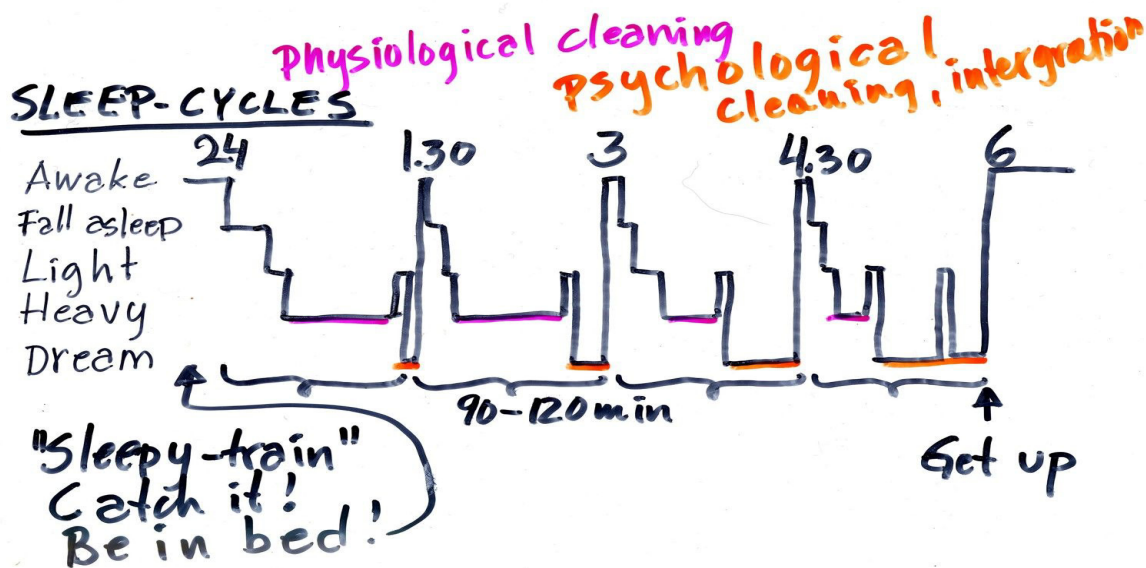
The art of resting that Fluchaire teaches is based on the concept of sleep cycles. Behind it is that our body has a biologically inherent rhythm with alternations between rest and activity. During the day, we notice that we are a little drowsy from time to time when we have little to do. Here's a good way to find out how long your basal cycle is: clock yourself between times of drowsiness: the signs are clear: yawning, heavy eyelids, itchy eyes, a head that wants to nod off. In the evening it is most noticeable.

There are apps you can use to measure your sleep rhythms. They work decently. It can be difficult to analyze what the results actually show. I want to recommend that you use your own feeling as a measuring instrument, so that you really listen and experience the signals that your body sends. You get extra training and experience in understanding what your body really needs. You will be able to maintain your health better by doing what your body needs.

The period length varies between 80 and 130 min for different people, but is always the same length for the same individual. During the night, the intervals take on the character of sleep cycles. Each sleep cycle contains different stages which are characterized by different brain activity. Each stage leads us deeper into sleep and in the final and fifth (paradoxical) stage come the dream in the REM-sleep. After that, consciousness rises to the surface; we may wake up for a moment before entering the next sleep cycle.

Actually, that is more important than how many sleep cycles we manage to pass. Think in terms of sleep cycles (not hours) when thinking about how long you should sleep. Forget about 7-8 hours of sleep. It is an average number. Like saying that everyone should wear shoes size 39, which is the average shoe size. No, the need for sleep varies a lot between us and also between different occasions for the same individual.

You are not a bad sleeper if you feel you need 10 hours or so. The body needs it then.



This is my own sleep rhythm with cycles of 90 min.

I wake up at 6 plus or minus 10 minutes without an alarm clock, if I have fallen asleep at (approx.) half past eleven, twelve, half past two, three or half past five. I am very careful about going to bed during these sleep train-stops. For long periods I can get by with two or three cycles. A few times a month I end up taking a maximum of two extra cycles. If I take more, I get a heavy head. Here I let the alarm clock mark the appropriate time to get up. And I don't take a siesta that day, but only short rest or meditation. During the summer holidays, I don't have an alarm clock.

The metaphor of a sleep-train that stops for just a moment at the station is nice to follow. You must be ready at the station to board. You have probably been involved in missing the sleep train. For example, when you sit late at night and study. And then you kind of yawn and check that you have two pages left on the chapter and think that I'll squeeze them too and then you go to the bathroom and brush your teeth and then you feel much more energetic. The sleep train has gone. If you go to bed now, it may take time before you fall asleep. You might lie and worry.

Here you can also see how to get into a good rhythm. Say you need to get up at 7.15 to make it to work. If you now feel that you have a different rhythm, set an alarm clock for 7.00 and wake up then. Get up! After a while (1-2 weeks) your body will adjust itself so that your sleep trains come according to the figure, for example just before 11 pm. You have a schedule with departure times!

Then you know that some time before, maybe 20 minutes, you have to start preparing for departure, the toilet visit. Then you lie in bed and wait for the sleeper train to arrive at the station. Maybe you're doing something (boring like Sudoku) that you can finish right when the yawn comes.

We can store sleep!

Take a nap as often as you have nothing else to do. Put away the mobil! Short sleep has different effects in the morning and afternoon. During the morning's short sleep, the dream element dominates (paradoxical stage). While in the afternoon, deep sleep dominates with its healing effect for the body. Then the body's cells are cleared of waste products faster.

The sleep train thus passes for me approximately every one-and a-half hours, always punctually and with clear signals of drowsiness. To fall asleep, it is enough to get on the train. There is no need for sleeping pills when nature itself, i.e. our brain, supports us with excellent aids. And when the corresponding signals come during the day - always just as regularly - then it's fine to take a short ride on the sleep train – take a nap.

Take a sleep cure every two months! Lay in bed for a whole weekend. Only get up to eat and other essentials.

If you live with a nice partner, you know what you can do all weekend. John Lennon and Ona did it.

Sleep quality = number of cycles x depth of sleep

Some only talk about the number of hours of sleep as the amount of sleep. It is important to also deepen the sleep. You can do that by sleeping in the "right environment": temperature, spacious and comfortable bed, empty (or almost) stomach, quiet room, dark etc

Absolutely avoid eating a big burger an hour before bed. The biochemical process industry prefers about 12 hours of activity (with food) and 12 hours of rest (with only tea and a little light food).

Some practical exercises

It may take 1-2 weeks before you notice any change, so don't give up too soon. To be completely safe, you should live with your new schedule for a full month. I have mentioned some of the advice earlier.

Remember that you actually do change your rhythm at least twice a year: summer/winter time transition and when we go to another time zone on vacation.

+ Keep a "yawn" diary for a week or two. Write in a table, for example, when you woke up during the night, when you woke up in the morning, when the alarm clock rang, when you

yawned, when you drank coffee (and what effect it had), when you did relaxation or light sleep, when you slept during the day, when you started to prepare for the sleeping-train, when you went to bed, when you fell asleep. You get to know your biological rhythm. And will get more sensitive to your signals from your body,

+ Unwind yourself every evening after studying. Avoid what you know is stimulating: net-surfing, TV, coffee, etc. Do what allows the eyes and mind to become passive: listen to music, read a book, snuggle close to your loved one. Take your time so that you are in bed when the appropriate sleep-train is on its way. It may be too late to drag yourself to the bathroom and then get alert of brushing your teeth. If you are lying in bed reading, be prepared to put the book down at any moment. Avoid "just reading the chapter". The sleep-train may then have departed. If you miss the sleep-train, then wait for the next one. It is more tiring for the body to be and spin in bed for a while and maybe get into the wrong rhythm.

+ When you lie in bed and wait for the Sandman, allow only thoughts about what was good during the day. Big or small: what you managed, problem you solved, the smile from the girl in the supermarket, the laundry that is done, etc. Only things that have really happened. No thoughts about what you should have done besides, nothing about the tricky tomorrow. Understand that the last thing you think about before you fall asleep goes into the first dream.

+ Wake up so you can lie down and enjoy the morning for 5-10 min. Stretch yourself and think about the beautiful day you have ahead of you. Full of challenges. NOTE positive thinking. You can make gentle movements that lubricate the joints: read "Waking up gently and lubricate the joints."

+ When you have an unsolved problem buzzing in your brain, it happens that you wake up in the middle of the night wide awake, maybe a little worried, but ready to work on that problem. Then get up and use the clairvoyance. It usually lasts minutes, 20 minutes at most. When you start to freeze, go back to bed.

+ During the day when you have nothing else to do, do a relaxation exercise or take a nap. For example, at morning and afternoon tea break (fikapaus), sleep 10-15 minutes after lunch, 10 minutes before class starts.

+ Take a nap as often as you feel the need. e.g. during short breaks, when you are reading at home. Flash nap involves sitting and nodding so thoroughly that the brain goes down to the alpha level, but only for a few seconds. You can hold a heavy rattling thing (key chain) in your hand, which hits the floor with a crash when the hand completely relaxes. Stretch and feel free to wash your face with cold water afterwards. If you continue to sleep after the thing is dropped, this is a sign that your body need more rest and extend your night's sleep with an extra cycle for the next few nights.

+ Two slices of sleep of 15-20 minutes each during the day can reduce the need for sleep at night. Churchill slept one cycle (2 hours) after lunch each day during the war and was able to reduce his night sleep by 2 cycles (4 hours). Meditation and deep relaxation can have the same effect on night sleep. When I learned to meditate, my need for sleep decreased radically.

+ Body temperature drops in the evening when the sleep train comes (you shiver) and increases when we have finished sleeping in the morning. Lower the temperature in the bedroom at night. Avoid the morning light coming in earlier than you need to get up.