

Early bird or night owl?

In life we all have our own rhythm—circadian rhythm, that is.



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Circadian rhythm

Our body is regulated by over 100 built-in clocks known as the circadian rhythm. Each unique 24-hour cycle influences an aspect of our body's function, including sleep, body temperature, hormone levels, heart rate, blood pressure and even pain threshold. Our body is normally synchronized to a light-dark 24-hour cycle we call a day. For some people, their rhythm is out of sync with the day, leading to a group of conditions known as circadian rhythm disorders. For many others, their energy and mood vary depending on the time of the day.

Morning vs. night people

Each person has their own circadian rhythm. Some individuals are morning people while others are night people. Do you sometimes wonder why you're raring to go in the evening when your partner is ready to fall asleep? What are the consequences on your relationship of having mismatched circadian rhythms?

The odd couple

A study was published in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy on the effects of spouses' sleep and wake patterns on the marriage. One hundred and fifty couples were interviewed and their sleep habits and marital interactions were assessed. The researchers reported that when couples were mismatched, that is an evening person matched to a morning person, the couples had significantly less marital adjustment, more marital conflict, spent less time in serious conversation, spent less time in shared activities and had sexual intercourse less frequently than matched couples.

Morning or night person quiz

Answer the questions below to see if you tend more toward morning or night.

1. When the alarm goes off, you:
 - a) Roll over, moan and then hit the snooze button.
 - b) Walk over to shut it off. You've been in the kitchen for 15 minutes already making breakfast and reading the morning paper.
2. Your morning ritual consists of:
 - a) Dress, eat some toast and get out the door in 15 minutes.
 - b) A morning workout, a breakfast of freshly squeezed juice, fresh fruit and crepes and watering the plants.
3. You are asked to attend 8:00 am meeting at work or school tomorrow. You:
 - a) Wonder if the alarm can be set that early and purchase lots of coffee.
 - b) Ask if you should come 30 minutes beforehand to prepare.
4. One of your favorite films starts at 11:00 pm on a work or school night, you:
 - a) Watch the movie and wonder how late can you show up tomorrow without anyone noticing.
 - b) Set the video recorder before going to bed and look forward to watching it tomorrow.
5. You call a friend at 9 pm and they are not home. You:
 - a) Leave a message to call you anytime tonight, you'll be up.
 - b) Don't leave a message—what if they call back at 9:30!!!

Results

If you answered mostly A, you are a night person.

If you answered mostly B, you are a morning person

What to do

Here are some tips for a mismatched morning-evening couple:

1. Get on the same schedule: Coordinate your daily rhythm to your partner's. Therefore, when they are

energized, you are energized and when they are sleepy, so are you. Try to do activities and hobbies that keep you and your partner on the same daily rhythm.

2. Be patient: You or your partner won't change their habits overnight. Give it some time. It is quite an adjustment to go from a night lifestyle to a morning lifestyle and vice versa.

3. Have regular sleeping hours: Try to sleep the same number of hours every night—ideally between seven and nine hours. Also, try to keep the time you go to bed and the time you wake up consistent. This will help you both establish a mutual rhythm to your day.

4. Get some sleep: You and your partner may be out of sync because you have poor sleep habits.