

The Body Clock

Body & health

What sets your internal clock, and why light timing matters more than duration.

An internal roughly-24-hour cycle governing sleep, temperature, hormones and alertness, reset each day chiefly by light reaching the eyes.

CYCLE
~24.2 h

OUTDOOR LIGHT
10,000+ lux

INDOORS
~300 lux

- Free-running, the human clock is slightly longer than 24 hours.
- Morning light advances it — you become sleepy earlier.
- Evening light delays it — you become sleepy later.
- Melatonin rises about two hours before habitual sleep.
- Core body temperature bottoms out roughly two hours before waking.
- Chronotype is largely genetic and shifts with age.

LOOK FOR IT

Ten minutes outdoors in the morning delivers more clock-setting light than a whole day indoors.

Jet lag is the clock disagreeing with local time. Roughly one day of adjustment per time zone crossed.