



## Nighttime Wind-Down

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Finish each day and be done with it.  
You have done what you could;  
some blunders and absurdities have crept in;  
forget them as soon as you can.  
Tomorrow is a new day;  
you shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit  
to be encumbered with your old nonsense.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON



After a long day of go-go-go activity, many people come home to an evening's worth of equally intense demands or, alternately, to numbing entertainments. Some continue work tasks late into the evening or do home- and family-related tasks straight until they go to bed. Others watch television or movies or play games to zone out, often putting sleep off for hours beyond a healthy bedtime.

They then fall into bed exhausted—but still wired—and have trouble falling asleep. Or they fall asleep only to wake again a few hours later, sometimes as the result of cycling worries, sometimes from the effects of alcoholic beverages they imbibed as a way to relax, detach, and put the day behind them.

The human nervous system wasn't designed for binary on-off operations, and the amount of adrenaline and cortisol produced during a too-busy or too-stressful day can pose a huge barrier to proper sleep—unless it is allowed to taper off and be replaced by pro-relaxation biochemicals (like melatonin and oxytocin) prior to retiring. Instituting a regular evening ritual helps accomplish this goal, preparing the body and mind for a good night's rest, and providing a conscious conclusion to the day.

## Nighttime Wind-Down Basics

### WHY?

- Allow for mental and physical “deceleration”—the slowing and settling down of the body-mind's complex, interconnected systems and signaling mechanisms.
- Set the stage for high-quality sleep by encouraging an advantageous mix and balance of neurotransmitters and hormones.
- Conquer insomnia and mid-sleep waking patterns.
- Optimize body's tissue-repair window and capacity.
- Set yourself up for success the next day by optimizing overnight energy regeneration.
- Support healthy circadian and ultradian rhythm cycles.
- Reduce inflammation, compromised metabolism, and hormone imbalance.
- Improve recovery from stress, trauma, and fitness activity.
- Improve romantic connection and create windows for intimacy.

**HOW?**

- Starting about an hour before bedtime (set an alert to remind you), begin winding down the active part of your day and preparing for sleep.
- Close down all work and shut off all screen-based devices and entertainments.
- Shift the energy and mood in your home: Lower house lights and sound, put on some relaxing music, or just enjoy the silence.
- Make yourself a warm, non-caffeinated beverage (like herbal tea or warm water) to sip as you complete the final actions of your day.
- Do your Evening Ablutions (see below) or other self-care activities in a calm, pleasant, ritualized way.
- Prepare your bedroom for sleep, making sure all light sources are completely darkened or blocked and the room temperature is lowered.
- Once you get into bed, do so with the intention of going to sleep. But allow for space *between* wake and sleep. Remember, the body operates in oscillating curves and waves, not binary on-off switches.

**What the Heck Are Evening Ablutions?**

The word *ablution* is an old-fashioned term that describes a ritualized act of self-washing or anointing with cleansing oils. This, I have found, is a great way to go about one's morning and evening wash-up and dental-care routines—the things most of us do a couple times a day anyway.

As you lather, scrub, rinse, moisturize, brush, and floss, intentionally slow down. Touch your face and body with reverence and care; assume an “ablution” consciousness. Make whatever you are doing a mindful self-grooming ritual, not just another perfunctory to-do. Make it a sacred rite rather than a rushed obligation. Take care of your body like it matters, like you love and value it just the way it is, and you will find it responds with relaxation, appreciation, and pleasure—not a bad way to head toward sleep.

# Optional Wind-Down Activities

- As you are concluding your day's projects, note any uncompleted tasks so you can get them off your brain without fear of losing track of them.
- Neatly stack your work. Review your next day's schedule and gather anything you'll need to take with you.
- As you turn your devices off, also set them to charge.
- Make sure your car keys, wallet, purse, and other bags are where you want them for the next day.
- After lowering the house lights as low as you practically can, consider lighting a few candles.
- Do a quick walk-through of the kitchen and your Morning Minutes practice area. Clear off any surfaces you've dirtied or cluttered up during your evening meal or activities.
- Get into your pajamas or strip down to your birthday suit. Soften the light in your bedroom or light candles. Waft some aromatherapy oil around. Rub a little moisturizing balm on your hands, feet, elbows.
- Look for and block any ambient lights or glowing displays, including small lights from smoke alarms and electronic thermostats.
- If you read before bed, read only from paper books, not electronic tablets. Steer clear of scary or distressing subjects, and avoid professional reading. Keep reading lights as low as tolerable.
- If you're doing the Healthy Deviant Adventure program, reserve a few minutes to review your Daily Deviance Journal Pages.
- Reflect on how your day went. Picture yourself back at your Morning Minutes practice area, and recall setting your intentions (do you remember what they were or how they played out?).
- Review any bright spots (positive moments, experiences or accomplishments that stand out) or areas of challenge; take stock of your blessings and feel your gratitude.
- Snuggle, love-up, or just be with yourself or your sleeping partner. If you have a partner, consider sharing some warm fuzzy thought or appreciation with them.
- When you are ready, turn off or blow out any remaining light sources.

- Take a big, deep breath; relax all your muscles (try first tensing and then relaxing any that don't seem to want to let go); then decide to release the day (see "A Mantra to Sleep On," below).
- Know that you have been enough, done enough. Now, it's time to rest, repair, recover—so that your body and mind can wake up ready to take on tomorrow.

## A Mantra to Sleep On

If you have difficulty letting the day go, or you have a mind that stays active long after you lie down, consider adopting a bedtime mantra (one you can repeat silently or aloud) as a way of confirming—for both your body and mind—that you are ready to relax and sleep.

For example, my older sister, who used to work at a domestic-abuse shelter and often came home stressed by the stories she'd heard, sometimes used the mantra "I am safe and cozy" to help her drift off. It worked well enough for her that she shared it with her clients at the shelter, and many told her they found it helpful in unwinding the fight-or-flight mindset they inhabited by default.

Interestingly, even though my sister no longer works at the shelter, her body-mind became so well trained to respond positively to her sleep mantra from that era that she sometimes still uses it today.

