

Understanding the four stages of sleep



When we think about sleep, we often hyperfocus on how many hours we're putting in the snooze bank. Some of us might even worry whether we'll ever achieve those elusive eight hours again.

However, whether you clock three hours, six, or seven -- sleep quality is more important than sleep quantity. Moody, listless, and foggy at the first morning light? Your sleep quality might be lacking.

Continuous sleep doesn't always represent quality sleep. To reap the benefits of a full night's rest, you need to complete the sleep cycle multiple times over.

The sleep cycle is composed of four separate sleep stages



Stage 1

This is the stage when we first transition into sleep. Our eyelids get heavy, and our minds feel a little foggy. Stage 1 lasts 5-10 minutes as our brains produce slower alpha waves that help us relax and drift off. Since we are still aware of our surroundings, it's common to wake up and be jerked away from sleep at this stage.

Stage 2

Stage 2 is mid-level sleep. While we aren't aware, we can be easily awoken. During stage 2, the body temperature drops, the heart rate slows, and the brain creates rapid activity known as sleep spindles. These sleep spindles are believed to aid memory.

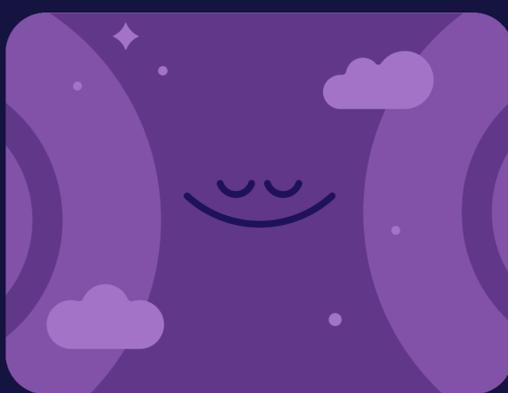


Stage 3

Now we've entered our deep sleep stage. The brain takes a rest while our bodies perform all sorts of restorative work, from repairing muscles to generating new cell growth.

REM Sleep

Maybe you've heard the rumors about REM. Characterized by random eye movements and vivid dreams, REM sleep is unique to mammals and birds. The brain is most active during the REM phase, and we dream as we process emotions.



Fun fact:

The body becomes immobilized during REM, so that we don't act out our dreams.

Helpful Headspace tips



If you feel anxious about being able to fall back to sleep, you've likely activated your body's sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight response). Show yourself some self-compassion and engage in a calming activity like [mindful cleaning](#).



Whether it's a warm bath with a book, listening to [sleepcasts](#) from [Sleep by Headspace](#), nature sounds, [sleep music](#), or [meditating](#), engaging in a gentle and joyous activity before bed helps create a smoother transition between wakefulness and sleep.



Science suggests that gratitude promotes better sleep. If your sleep quality isn't serving you, try adding a gratitude practice to your bedtime routine. You can use these [Gratitude Journaling Prompts](#) to give you a nudge.



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