

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak  
COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: Help! I can't wake up! No matter how hard I try, I struggle getting out of bed in the morning. It doesn't matter whether I get four hours of sleep or eight, it feels the same to me when my alarm goes off. I'm very drowsy and just want to keep sleeping. Even after I get out of bed, I lack in energy despite having a cup of coffee. And the times I force myself to immediately jump out of bed after awaking to a super loud alarm don't seem to work very well either. It only makes me feel tense and stressed and that feeling doesn't subside until half way through the day. Do you have any wake-up tricks or tips to share to help me get my days off to a better start?

#### DROWSY IN THE MORNING



DEAR DROWSY IN THE MORNING: Many people share your frustrations when waking up in the morning. First, I recommend you see your doctor to verify you don't have a sleep disorder like sleep apnea. (Sleep apnea is a condition where you stop breathing for several seconds many times throughout the night, subconsciously waking up to gasp for air or twitch to restart your breathing function. This results in an unsettling night of sleep, contributing significantly to a feeling of being tired all day long.)

If you don't have a sleep disorder, then I recommend you try the following:

1) *Awaken without a jarring*

# Help! I can't wake up!

*alarm.* Ease, don't leap out of bed. Where possible, awaken to pleasing music, which tends to be much more invigorating and relaxing than the traditional, loud-tone alarm. Keep the volume low. By easing out of sleep you retain more of the invigorating power of sleep and won't feel that immediate rush of stress associated with loud alarms and Jack-in-the-Box-style wake-ups.

While still in bed, take a few moments to be still. Blink your eyes. Take several deep breaths. Open and close your hands. Loosen your shoulders and release any tension you notice in the neck, jaw, back, or arms. When you rise from the covers, do it slowly, giving your muscles a chance to ease into action.

2) *Turn on the lights.* The brain responds to many signals but few are more powerful than light. The body has hundreds of biochemical hormonal rhythms, all keyed to light and dark, and the mind and senses are powerfully affected by exposure to bright light (comparable to daylight just after dawn).

While on vacation, have you ever stepped outside on sunny mornings to take in fresh air and soak in the brightness? Did it give you a feeling of calm energy? Perhaps you can do that same thing when you're not on vacation as well.

3) *Get at least five minutes of relaxed physical activity.* Maybe take your dog out for a short walk or pedal on an exercise bike at a moderate pace or walk on a treadmill. Do something light that can stir up your circulation. This little

bit of physical activity sends a signal to the brain to reduce tension and increase alertness and calm energy.

4) *Enjoy several bites of a great-tasting breakfast.* More than any other food we eat all day, breakfast may matter most. When you start the day with a low-fat, high-fiber breakfast, you switch on and turn up your energy. In fact, the right kind of low-fat breakfast helps set up your energy level for the entire day.

Examples of a good breakfast are a bowl of oatmeal with low-fat milk and a piece of fruit, or a slice of whole-grain bread with nonfat cream cheese and salmon or all-fruit preserves.

5) *Jot down or think through your next day's activities before you go to bed.* This personal review enables you to settle your mind about upcoming activities or events scheduled for the next day and will help you relax for a good night's sleep.

Lastly, if you do this and still lay wide awake in bed at night, don't let it stress you out. Read a book or do a crossword puzzle (or anything that calmly attracts your attention) and your mind will shift to sleep time. You should also exercise at some point during the day as it helps make it easier to fall asleep at night.



*For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to [www.DearChiefAdvice.com](http://www.DearChiefAdvice.com) and submit your comments or email them to [Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com](mailto:Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com).*