



CENTER *for*
BRAINHEALTH®
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

ALLI BRAIN HEALTH GUIDE

Alliance for Living and
Learning Intentionally
with Brain Health

The Power
of Sleep



The Role of a Community Brain Health Coach

Rather than prescribing what students should do for their brain health, a coach (1) educates students with easy-to-understand science that explains why certain habits are brain-healthier than others, (2) provides a framework for students to make informed decisions about ways to improve their brain health, and (3) offers ongoing accountability and support to help students maintain progress and adapt brain health habits as needed.

Sleep and Mental Health

Sleep is more than rest – it is when your brain **regulates emotions, processes stress** and **consolidates memories**. Sleep and mental health have a bidirectional relationship, meaning they influence each other. Poor or irregular sleep is closely linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression and stress. At the same time, mental health issues can also disrupt sleep, creating a cycle that negatively affects both sleep problems and mental well-being.



Good sleep is not optional. It is one of the most powerful protectors of mental health. Prioritizing sleep can boost your mood, focus and resilience!

Pre-Intervention Survey

1. To what degree do you believe this statement:
"I have the power to improve my sleep."

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Somewhat Agree
- c. No Opinion
- d. Somewhat Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

2. What do you hope to get out of this 4-week sleep course and coaching?

3. How do you want your sleep to improve?

4. What keeps you from getting good quality sleep? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Work/school schedule
- b. Caregiving
- c. Busy mind or worrying about the next day
- d. Physical reasons (discomfort, pain, bathroom)
- e. Sleep environment (light, noise, temperature)
- f. Sleep items (poor mattress, pillows, etc.)
- g. Other (explain):

5. What do you value most as a support tool for your sleep?

- a. Learning about healthy sleep habits
- b. Encouragement or support
- c. Accountability to help me stay on track
- d. Other (explain):

WEEK 1

Daytime Habits to Support Sleep



DID YOU KNOW?

Good sleep habits help improve memory storage, metabolism and mood. While you snooze, your brain performs some important housekeeping tasks, clearing away toxins that build up during waking hours. Sleep also helps the brain process emotional experiences, consolidate memories and reset its response to stress. REM sleep is especially beneficial, acting as a form of “emotional first aid” that helps the brain manage and recover from challenges.



Aim for around 15 minutes of natural sunlight in the morning.

Getting daylight plays a big part in keeping your circadian rhythm functioning normally. This is the brain’s “sleep clock” that regulates sleep and wakefulness cycles.



If you need to nap, try to keep it within 20 minutes.

Brief naps during the day are refreshing and can help us be more productive, but longer naps can make it harder to fall or stay asleep at night.



Get your steps in (or exercise) at least three hours before you go to bed.

Evening exercise can also interfere with circadian rhythm and make it harder to fall asleep.



Reduce caffeine and nicotine use.

Caffeine and nicotine both act as stimulants to the brain, increasing alertness levels – and both can negatively impact quality of sleep.



Eat mainly in first and middle parts of the day.

If hunger strikes at night, limit yourself to a light and healthy snack.



Make your bed in the morning.

Resisting the urge to stay in bed a little longer can pay off. Maintaining a consistent wake-up routine helps signal your brain when it’s time to wake up and when it’s time to sleep.

WEEK 1

Reflection & Action

Daytime habits I already do that support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Habits I have that make it harder to go to sleep or have good sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

New daytime habits I want to try that could support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

**Recap with Coach
(Fill out next week)**

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

WEEK 2

Evening Habits to Support Sleep

DID YOU KNOW?

Your daily habits, especially those practiced before bedtime, have a major impact on sleep quality. Healthy habits can promote restful sleep, while poor habits can contribute to sleep difficulties. Good sleep supports memory consolidation, metabolism and mood, whereas sleep deprivation makes it harder to regulate emotions and cope with stress. Sleep keeps your brain's emotion center (the amygdala) in check, but a sleep-deprived brain experiences a drop in communication between the amygdala and the brain's control center (the prefrontal cortex), making it more difficult to regulate your emotions.



Stick to a schedule.

Set a bedtime that allows you to get 7-9 hours of sleep and make it a priority to follow it as consistently as possible.



Create a relaxing bedtime routine.

Signal your body that it's time to start winding down with healthy habits, like mindfulness practices, reading for pleasure, a calming bath, gentle stretching and herbal teas.



Avoid alcohol in the evening.

While alcohol may initially help you fall asleep, it can cause disrupted or poor-quality sleep throughout the night.



Avoid large meals before bedtime.

Eat mainly in first and middle parts of the day. If you are hungry at night, eat a light, healthy snack.



Write your to-do list.

Quiet anxious thoughts about what you need to do the next day by writing down your to-do list after work or in the early evening.



Reduce screentime before bed.

Ideally, stop using electronics at least 30 minutes before you go to bed. If this isn't possible for you or people in your family, do whatever you can to reduce stressful and/or stimulating screentime before bed.

WEEK 2

Reflection & Action

Evening habits I already do that support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____

New evening habits to support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Barriers I may encounter and ways to minimize / overcome the barrier:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Successes / New Insights from previous week

- _____
- _____
- _____

**Recap with Coach
(Fill out next week)**

- _____
- _____
- _____

WEEK 3

Nighttime Habits to Support Sleep

DID YOU KNOW?

Your overall health and daily functioning depend on getting good sleep. Even small improvements to your sleep patterns can have a significant impact on how well your brain functions throughout the day. It's not just about how much sleep you get – timing and sleep patterns matter too. Going to bed late, even if it matches your natural "night owl" tendencies, has been linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders. Teens and young adults also tend to underestimate how much sleep they really need, with most college students needing 7-9 hours of sleep each night.



Keep the bedroom temperature around 64-70 degrees.

A cooler room helps lower your body temperature and signals to your brain that it's time to sleep.



Keep it quiet.

Minimize noise or use a white noise machine or app to block out distracting sounds.



Keep it dark.

Use blackout curtains, shades or an eye mask to block out light and create a space where you can fall asleep faster and sleep longer.



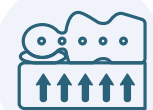
Try to keep electronics out of the picture.

Limit access to computers, televisions and other electronic devices in the bedroom.



Don't stay in bed if you (really) can't sleep.

After 20 minutes of restlessness, or if you're starting to get anxious in bed, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy. Keep the lights dim and limit yourself to activities that are not too stimulating. (Bright lights or excitement increase alertness and make sleep more difficult.)



Check the quality of your mattress & pillow.

Over 30% of our lives are spent in bed, so this may be worth investing in.

WEEK 3

Reflection & Action

Nighttime habits I already do that support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____

New nighttime habits to support sleep:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Barriers I may encounter and ways to minimize / overcome the barrier:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Success from the previous week and/or other resources to consider:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Recap with Coach (Fill out next week)

- _____
- _____
- _____

WEEK 4

My Sleep Plan



Thinking back on what you've learned over the past few weeks, create your own healthy sleep plan. Based on your current lifestyle, list some simple steps you can take to support better sleep. Include any new sleep habits you've already started and would like to continue.

In the daytime:

- _____
- _____
- _____

In the evening:

- _____
- _____
- _____

During the night:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Obstacles I expect to encounter and tips to help me minimize / overcome:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Coach Feedback

[illegible]

Post-Intervention Survey

Effectiveness of Intervention:

1. To what degree do you believe this statement: "I have the power to improve my sleep."

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| a. Strongly Agree | d. Somewhat Disagree |
| b. Somewhat Agree | e. Strongly Disagree |
| c. No Opinion | |

2. Which specific sleep practices or strategies did you find most helpful? Why?

3. What specific improvements in your sleep did you experience through this intervention?

4. What was of value to you during this training? (Select as many as apply.)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| a. Learning healthy sleep habits | c. Accountability to help me stay on track |
| b. Encouragement or support | d. Other (explain): _____ |

Impact on Daily Life:

5. Has the training improved your daily quality of life? If yes, in what ways?

Long-Term Sustainability:

6. Do you feel confident in your ability to continue applying the practices learned in this training on your own?

Tell us what you think!

Got 1 minute? Share your feedback and let us know what you enjoyed about the course. Your input matters and helps us make the experience even better!



References:

Columbia University Department of Psychiatry. (2022, March 16). *How sleep deprivation impacts mental health*. <https://www.columbiapsychiatry.org/news/how-sleep-deprivation-affects-your-mental-health>

Foster, R. (2026). *Circadian rhythms & sleep: The secret to lifelong brain health* [Video]. Center for BrainHealth, The University of Texas at Dallas. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLf_95e6YGo

Suni, E. (2025, July 11). *Mental health and sleep*. Sleep Foundation. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/mental-health>

Tompa, R. (2025, August 11). *How sleep affects mental health (and vice versa): What the science says*. Stanford Medicine. <https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2025/08/sleep-mental-health-connection-what-science-says.html>

Walker, M. [TED]. (2020, February 21). *How sleep affects your emotions | Sleeping with Science, A TED Series* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6F8wFkScnME>

Walker, M. P. (2017). *Why we sleep: Unlocking the power of sleep and dreams*. Scribner.