

ONE SMALL SHIFT - *Sleep Without Forcing it*

By Brittany Sloan

What This Month Is About

Sleep is not something we accomplish.

It is something the body allows.

Yet many of us approach sleep the same way we approach work or productivity:

Try it
Fix it
Optimize it

When sleep doesn't come easily, we respond by adding pressure—checking the clock, reviewing the day, planning tomorrow, or searching for solutions.

This month is different: Instead of trying to control sleep, we are creating a small window that allows it to happen.

What the Research Is Actually Saying

Problem-solving tasks.

Work-related thinking.

Screen exposure.

Sleep research consistently shows that delaying **pre-sleep cognitive stimulation** (gentle mental activities that calm and distract the mind from daily stressors) slows sleep onset and reduces sleep quality.

Studies on sleep hygiene suggest that reducing mental and environmental stimulation before bed helps signal to the brain that the day is ending.

A comprehensive review by Irish et al. (2015, *Sleep Medicine Reviews*) found that behaviors such as lowering stimulation, limiting screen exposure, and creating a transition period before bed are associated with improved sleep onset and sleep quality.

That means:

Sleep often improves not when we force it, but when we give the nervous system space to downshift.

Not forcing sleep to happen.
Removing obstacles that keep the brain in alert mode.

One Small Shift

Once this week, protect **30 minutes before sleep** from stimulation.

No screens.
No problem-solving.
No planning tomorrow.

Just a pause.

How to Try It

Keep this practical and low effort.

Consider trying some of these:

Lower the lights in your space.
Sit quietly with a cup of tea.
Read a few pages of something light.
Stretch or lie down.
Write a few thoughts from the day.
Listen to quiet music.

The goal is not productivity. The goal is *transition*.

Why This Works

Throughout the day, your nervous system is active—processing conversations, decisions, notifications, and information.

When constant stimulation continues right up until bedtime, the brain remains in a **state of cognitive activation**, making it harder for sleep to begin.

Even short reductions in stimulation can help the body shift toward the parasympathetic state that supports sleep.

Sleep doesn't need to be forced.
It needs space.

Remember...

For research participants, clinicians, and professionals alike, this matters:

Small environmental shifts can influence sleep just as much as large lifestyle changes.

Sometimes the smallest shift is simply creating a quiet moment before sleep and letting the body do what it already knows how to do.

Let that be enough.