

Morning Routine Checklist

Checklist · 48 items · 6 sections

A sustainable morning routine built from sleep and circadian research, not influencer rituals. Each item flags whether it is core science, supplemental, or optional, so you can build a version that fits your actual life instead of someone else's 4:30am highlight reel.

Open the editable version online:

<https://genechecklist.com/checklist/morning-routine-checklist>

NIGHT BEFORE (SETS UP THE MORNING)

- Pick a consistent wake time and protect it 7 days a week
HIGH
Regularity beats duration for circadian stability (Walker, Why We Sleep).
- Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep opportunity
HIGH
Anything under 6 hours degrades next-day cognition (CDC, NSF guidelines).
- Dim overhead lights 1-2 hours before bed
HIGH
Bright light at night suppresses melatonin (Huberman protocol).
- Stop caffeine by early afternoon, ideally 8-10 hours before bed
HIGH
Half-life is 5-6 hours.
- Lay out clothes, gym bag, and keys the night before
Removes morning decision fatigue (Atomic Habits).
- Write tomorrow's top 3 priorities before closing the laptop
Offloads planning so the brain stops rehearsing it at 2am.
- Set the bedroom to 65-68°F (18-20°C)
Cooler rooms support sleep onset.
- Charge the phone outside the bedroom or across the room
Removes the reach-and-scroll reflex on waking.
- Use a sunrise alarm clock instead of a phone alarm
Gentler cortisol awakening response.

FIRST 30 MINUTES AWAKE

- Get out of bed within 10 minutes of the alarm
HIGH

Snoozing fragments sleep without adding recovery.

- Drink 16-20 oz of water before anything else

HIGH

Rehydrates after 7+ hours of fluid loss.

- Get 10 minutes of natural sunlight within 30-60 min of waking

HIGH

Anchors circadian rhythm and cortisol peak (Huberman protocol).

- On cloudy days, extend outdoor light exposure to 20-30 minutes

HIGH

Lux levels drop sharply through clouds and windows.

- Skip sunglasses during morning light exposure (but never look directly at the sun)

HIGH

Retinal light hitting melanopsin cells is the circadian trigger.

- Keep the phone face down or out of reach for the first 30 minutes

HIGH

Protects the cortisol awakening response from input overload.

- If you can't get outside, open blinds and turn on bright indoor lights

Better than nothing, weaker than direct sunlight.

- Add a pinch of salt or electrolytes to the first glass of water if you sweat overnight or eat low-carb

- Make the bed

Small completed task that builds momentum (Atomic Habits).

MOVEMENT (30-60 MINUTES IN)

- Do 20-30 minutes of movement most days

HIGH

Meets CDC guideline of 150 minutes moderate activity per week.

- Walk outside if nothing else (stacks circadian light exposure with cardiovascular benefit)

HIGH

- Add 2-3 resistance sessions per week

Preserves muscle mass and insulin sensitivity.

- Do 5-10 minutes of mobility or dynamic stretching before sitting at a desk

Reduces stiffness from overnight immobility.

- Get the heart rate up briefly, even just stairs or a 1-minute set

Raises core body temp and alertness.

- Try a 1-3 minute cold shower at the end of a normal shower

Some evidence for alertness and mood. Optional, not mandatory (Huberman).

- Skip fasted high-intensity training if you sleep poorly

Prioritize recovery over optimization theatre.

BREAKFAST AND CAFFEINE

- Delay caffeine 90-120 minutes after waking

HIGH

Lets adenosine clear naturally and avoids the mid-morning crash (Huberman protocol).

- Cap caffeine at roughly 400 mg per day (FDA safe-intake threshold for healthy adults)

HIGH

- Eat 25-40 g of protein at breakfast

HIGH

Improves satiety and stabilizes blood sugar vs. carb-only meals.

- Include a fiber source: berries, oats, vegetables, or seeds

Slows glucose absorption.

- Eat within 1-2 hours of waking if you train in the morning

Skip only if you are deliberately doing time-restricted eating.

- Keep added sugar low at breakfast

Large sugar spikes drive the 10am energy slump.

- Try matcha or yerba mate as an alternative to coffee

Lower peak caffeine, gentler curve.

- Skip 'bulletproof' coffee unless it fits your calorie budget

Butter and MCT oil are calories, not magic.

MINDSET AND FOCUS

- Do 5-10 minutes of breathing, meditation, or quiet sitting

HIGH

Consistent practice reduces reactivity (Headspace and Calm clinical trials).

- Write 3 things you are grateful for

HIGH

Positive psychology research links gratitude practice to reduced depressive symptoms (Emmons & McCullough).

- Identify your one most important task before opening email or Slack

Protects the highest-focus window of the day.

- Do 60-90 minutes of focused work before any meetings if your schedule allows

Morning cortisol peak supports deep work.

- Use box breathing or physiological sighs before a stressful first meeting (1-3 min)

Lowers acute stress response.

- Journal for 5 minutes if it helps; optional, not required

- Read 10 pages of a book as a low-friction stand-in for doomscrolling

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Do NOT check email or social media in bed

HIGH

Trains the brain to wake up reactive.

- Do NOT hit snooze repeatedly

HIGH

5-20 minute fragments add stress, not rest.

- Do NOT skip breakfast and then triple-dose caffeine
HIGH
Drives jitter and a hard crash.
- Do NOT drink alcohol the night before and expect a real morning
HIGH
Alcohol fragments REM and deep sleep (Walker).
- Do NOT copy someone else's 4:30am routine
Sleep chronotype is partly genetic. Forcing it backfires.
- Do NOT stack 12 new habits on day one
Pick 2-3 and anchor them to existing cues (Atomic Habits).
- Do NOT treat cold plunges, supplements, or red-light panels as substitutes for sleep and sunlight
Order of operations matters.
- Do NOT weigh yourself every morning if it wrecks your mood
Data is only useful if you use it.