



Understanding Your Sleep: Quality & Duration

A good night's sleep isn't just about how many hours you spend in bed. It's also about how your sleep is organized into stages, what sleep specialists call **sleep architecture**. Each stage plays a different role in restoring your body and mind.

Your sleep moves in cycles lasting about **90–120 minutes**, repeating **4–6 times a night**. Every stage matters: if one is disrupted, sleep may not feel refreshing, even if you “slept enough hours.”

Stage N1: The “Drifting Off” Stage (Light Sleep)

About 5% of total sleep

- You're just starting to fall asleep. This is when you might feel like you're “jerking awake”
- Muscles relax slightly; breathing and heart rate slow down

Why it matters: If you wake up often during the night, you can get stuck cycling through this light stage and never reach deeper, more restorative sleep.

Stage N2: Light Sleep (The Stabilizer)

About 45–55% of your night, the biggest chunk of sleep

- Body temperature drops, muscles relax further, and eye movements stop
- The brain does “housekeeping” work that supports learning and memory

Why it matters: N2 acts as a bridge to deeper sleep. When sleep keeps getting interrupted, you can spend too much time here and miss out on deep sleep and dream sleep.

Stage N3: Deep Sleep (Slow Wave Sleep)

About 15–20% of your night, concentrated in the first half

- The deepest, most restorative stage, and the hardest to wake from
- Your body repairs itself: muscles and tissues heal, growth hormone is released, and the immune system recharges
- Blood pressure and heart rate reach their lowest, most restful point

Why it matters: Without enough deep sleep, you may feel physically drained, get sick more easily, and recover more slowly.

REM Sleep: Dream Sleep

About 20–25% of your night, concentrated in the second half

- Your brain is highly active. This is when most dreaming happens
- Supports emotional balance, problem-solving, creativity, and memory
- Your body is essentially paralyzed (except your eyes and breathing muscles)

Why it matters: Without enough REM sleep, mood, memory, and focus all suffer. Many people with sleep-disordered breathing still show a normal percentage of REM sleep, but it isn't consolidated into unbroken stretches, which can affect brain health over time.

The Big Picture

Stage	Role
N1	The doorway to sleep; fragile and easily disturbed
N2	The bulk of your night; stabilizes and protects sleep
N3	The deepest, most restorative stage; critical for physical health and immunity
REM	Dream sleep; vital for brain health, mood, and memory

All four stages are necessary. When sleep is disrupted, such as by sleep-disordered breathing, you may get “enough hours” but still wake up tired, foggy, or unrefreshed.