

 EVERYDAY ENGLISH

The Night Shift

Sleep science vocabulary, hedging language, and a genuinely surprising discovery about your own mind.



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1

warm-up

Discuss these questions before we begin.



1

How many hours do you usually sleep, and how does that compare to what you think you "should" get?



2

Do you remember your dreams often? Do you think dreams mean anything?



3

Do you believe you can "catch up" on lost sleep by sleeping in at the weekend?



4

If you could ask a scientist one question about sleep, what would it be?



5

What's the worst night's sleep you can remember, and how did the next day feel?

SCAN
ME

2

video comprehension

Watch "A walk through the stages of sleep" before completing the exercises.

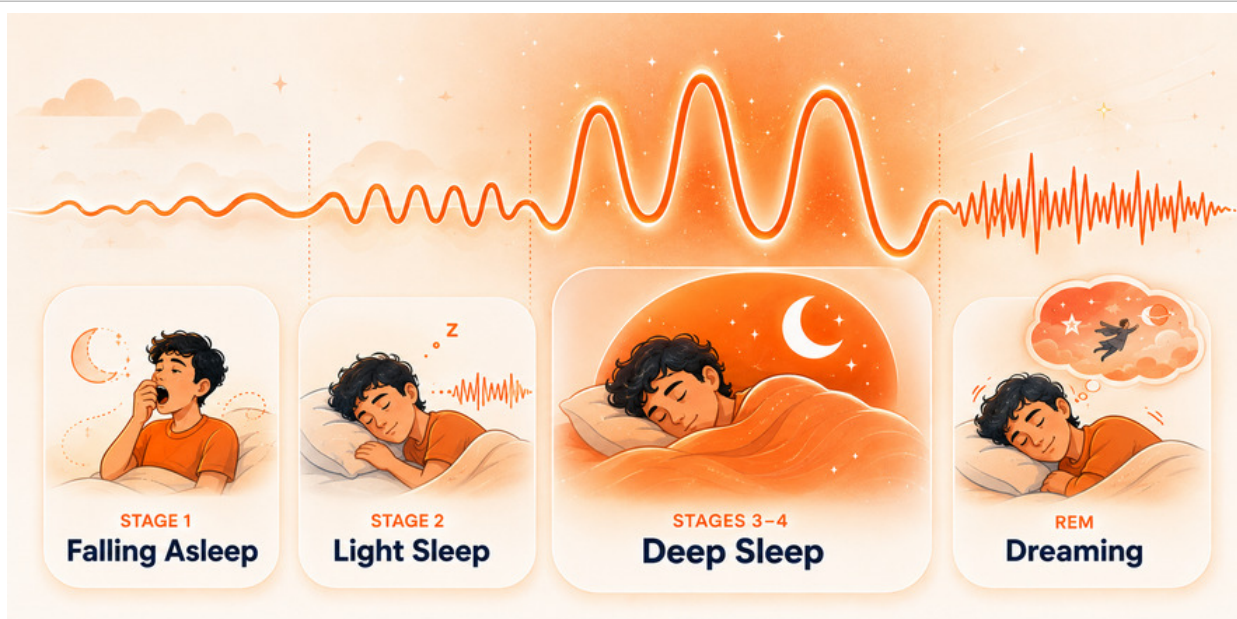
▶ Watch here: youtube.com/watch?v=eM2VWspRpfk**Part A — True or False**

T/F	Statement
---	Sleep is divided into two main types: REM and non-REM sleep.
---	Non-REM sleep has three stages of increasing depth.
---	During deep non-REM sleep, the immune system is recharged and memories are consolidated.
---	Brain wave activity slows down during REM sleep.
---	A typical sleep cycle, moving through non-REM and REM, lasts around 90 minutes.

Part B — Fill in the Gaps**WORD BANK**

recharged · hallucinogenic · domination · seesaw · architecture

1. During deep non-REM sleep, the body's immune system is _____.
2. REM sleep produces the most vivid and _____ dreams.
3. Throughout the night, non-REM and REM sleep are described as being in a battle for brain _____.
4. As the night goes on, the balance between non-REM and REM sleep shifts, like a _____.
5. This pattern creates a standard cycling _____ to human sleep.





2 video comprehension

Part C — Comprehension

- What happens in the body during deep non-REM sleep (stages 3 and 4)?

- What role does REM sleep play in emotional processing and creativity, according to the speaker?

- How does the balance between non-REM and REM sleep change across the night?

- In the example given, why does someone who wakes up two hours early lose a much higher percentage of their REM sleep than their total sleep time?

- Did anything in this video surprise you? What was it?

3 pre-reading vocabulary

Read, repeat, and master these words before reading the article.

 Match each word to its definition. Definitions are shuffled — write the correct letter in the Answer box.

#	Word	Answer	Def.	Definition
1	Trigger		A	something produced as a side effect of another process
2	Regulate		B	forming the basic hidden cause or foundation of something
3				
4	Consolidate		C	completely new and important; introducing new ideas
	Correlation		D	indicating something without proving it completely
5	A growing body of research		E	unwanted substances produced when the body processes energy
6	Byproduct		F	the brain's waste-clearing system, active mainly during sleep
7	Underlying		G	remaining or staying longer than expected
8	Groundbreaking		H	to cause something to start happening
9	Suggestive		I	to control a process so it works correctly and consistently
10	Metabolic waste		J	to make something more solid, stable, or permanent
11	Glymphatic system		K	a connection or relationship between two things
12	Lingering		L	an increasing amount of scientific evidence on a topic



4

reading**The Brain's Night Shift: How Sleep Cleans Your Mind**

Here's something that sounds more like science fiction than biology: while you sleep, your brain washes itself.

For a long time, scientists assumed the brain simply "switched off" at night, idling until morning. That assumption turned out to be almost completely wrong. A series of studies over the past decade — much of it built on research first published around 2012 — revealed something researchers hadn't expected: during deep sleep, brain cells actually shrink slightly, and the fluid surrounding them starts flowing through brain tissue at a dramatically faster rate than during the day. This fluid doesn't just sit there. It flushes through the spaces between neurons like water through a network of narrow channels, carrying away the metabolic waste that brain activity produces over the course of a day. It's a strange thing to picture: your brain quietly rearranging its own plumbing every night, just to make room for a proper clean.

Researchers have named this the glymphatic system, and it's thought to function as something like a nightly cleaning crew. Among the byproducts it clears out is a protein called beta-amyloid — the same substance that tends to build up abnormally in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease. This doesn't mean poor sleep directly causes Alzheimer's; the relationship is far more complicated than that, and researchers are still working out exactly how the two are connected. But the correlation is striking enough that a growing body of research now treats sleep quality as a genuinely important factor in long-term brain health, not just a nice-to-have.

What's especially interesting is the timing. This cleaning process appears to be triggered specifically by deep, slow-wave sleep — the heavy, low-activity stage that dominates the first half of the night. Skip or shorten that stage, and the brain may not get the chance to regulate this process properly, even if total sleep time looks roughly normal on paper. In other words, two people could sleep the same number of hours and still come away with very different amounts of this overnight "washing," depending on how much deep sleep they actually got.

None of this happens in isolation, either. The same slow-wave stage that seems to drive the brain's cleaning cycle also plays a central role in consolidating memories — taking fragile, short-term impressions from the day and fixing them more permanently into long-term storage. So the deep sleep your brain relies on to clear out waste appears to be closely tied to the same process that helps you actually remember what you learned. It's a neat, if slightly humbling, discovery: the same nightly maintenance shift that keeps your brain physically cleaner might also be the reason yesterday's lecture, conversation, or new skill sticks with you at all.

Scientists are still cautious about overstating what all this means. Much of the underlying research so far has been conducted in animals, and human studies — while promising — are harder to run and still developing. Researchers tend to describe the findings as "suggestive" rather than definitive, and rightly so; a single elegant mechanism rarely explains something as complex as brain health on its own. Still, the discovery is considered groundbreaking enough that it has reshaped how many scientists think about what sleep is actually for — not simply rest, but active, structured maintenance work carried out largely without your awareness.

It also reframes a familiar experience in an interesting way. That foggy, sluggish feeling after a short night's sleep may not just be tiredness in the ordinary sense. It could be, at least in part, a brain that didn't get its usual overnight maintenance shift — waste products lingering a little longer than they should, and yesterday's memories left slightly less secure than they would otherwise be. Framed that way, a bad night's sleep starts to look less like simple exhaustion and more like a missed appointment with your own maintenance crew.

Sleep researchers are quick to point out that this is still an active, evolving area of study, and there's plenty left to figure out about exactly how the system works in humans. But for a process that, until fairly recently, nobody knew existed at all, it's a genuinely remarkable piece of the puzzle — evidence that the "night shift" happening inside your skull might be doing far more structural work than anyone assumed.





4

reading**Before and after reading****Part A — Prediction (before you read)**

1. What do you think might happen inside the brain while you sleep, beyond simply “resting”?

2. Have you ever heard of the brain “cleaning itself”? What do you imagine that might involve?

Part B — Reading for Gist

1. In one sentence, what is the main discovery this article describes?

Part D — Vocabulary in Context

 Find these words in the article. Based on the context around them, guess what each one means — don't use a dictionary yet.

Word	Your guess
sluggish	
elegant	
humbling	
reframes	
foggy	
evolving	





4

reading

Part C—Phrase Gap-Fill

PHRASE BANK — 3 PHRASES ARE NOT USED

A brain cells actually shrink slightly · **B** flushes through the spaces between neurons · **C** a nightly cleaning crew · **D** the correlation is striking enough · **E** triggered specifically by deep, slow-wave sleep · **F** closely tied to the same process that helps you actually remember · **G** reshaped how many scientists think about what sleep is actually for · **H** far more structural work than anyone assumed · **I** the brain completely shuts down during sleep · **J** human studies have fully confirmed this theory · **K** sleep quality has no connection to brain health

1. During deep sleep, _____, and the fluid around them starts flowing through brain tissue much faster than during the day.
2. It _____ like water through a network of narrow channels, carrying away metabolic waste.
3. It's thought to function as something like _____.
4. But _____ that a growing body of research now treats sleep quality as a genuinely important factor in brain health.
5. This cleaning process appears to be _____.
6. The deep sleep your brain relies on to clear out waste appears to be _____ what you learned.
7. The discovery is considered groundbreaking enough that it has _____ actually for.
8. Evidence that the "night shift" happening inside your skull might be doing _____.





4

reading**Part E—Comprehension & Part F — Language Notice**

1. What is the glymphatic system, according to the article?

2. Why do researchers remain cautious about the connection between sleep and Alzheimer's disease?

3. Why does the article link deep sleep to both "brain cleaning" and memory consolidation?

4. What does the article suggest might explain the "foggy, sluggish feeling" after a short night's sleep?

5. Do you find this discovery convincing, or are you skeptical? Why?

6. Which idea from the article surprised you the most?

Part F — Language Notice

Find and underline 3 expressions or collocations in the article that you'd like to remember. Write them below, then create an original sentence using each one.





5

listening**"Sleep Myths: Separating Fact from Fiction" — an interview with a sleep researcher****Audio:** Emma interviews Dr. Elena Voss, a sleep researcher, about common sleep myths.**Part A — Comprehension**

1. According to Dr. Voss, can you fully "catch up" on lost sleep over a weekend?

2. Is it true that everyone needs exactly eight hours of sleep?

3. Why do older adults appear to need less sleep, according to Dr. Voss?

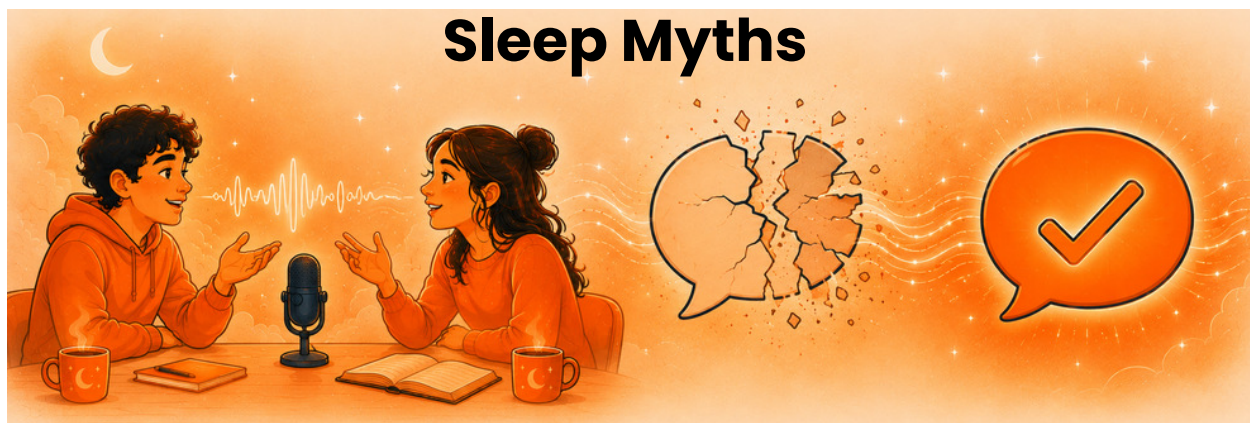
4. Does warm milk chemically help you sleep, according to Dr. Voss?

5. Why do some people believe they don't dream, according to the interview?

Part B — Fill in the Gaps**WORD BANK**

entirely · average · quality · evidence · REM

1. "It's a great question, and the honest answer is: partly, but not _____."
2. "Eight hours is a reasonable _____ for most adults."
3. "It appears to be more about sleep _____ changing than the actual need for sleep decreasing."
4. "There's no strong _____ that milk itself does much chemically."
5. "It's thought that everyone dreams multiple times a night, during _____ sleep."





6

grammar — hedging language

Expressing uncertainty and describing research diplomatically.

Type	Examples
Modal verbs	may, might, could
Lexical hedges	tend to, appear to, seem to, is thought to
Reporting structures	"Research suggests that...", "It has been found that..."

EXAMPLES

"Sleep deprivation may affect memory more than people realize." · "It's thought that dreaming helps process emotions." · "Older adults tend to sleep more lightly." · "Research suggests that deep sleep triggers the brain's cleaning process." · "This could explain why some people feel foggy after a short night's sleep."

Controlled Practice

1. Studies ___ (suggest) that poor sleep ___ (affect) memory consolidation.
2. It ___ (think) that dreams help process difficult emotions.
3. Sleep needs (are / might be / definitely are) different for every individual.
4. Rewrite using a hedge: "Deep sleep cleans the brain." _____
5. Find and correct the errors: "Researchers think that maybe sleep are important for memory."

6. The results ___ (appear) to support the theory, although more research is needed.
7. This finding ___ (may/might) explain why some people forget their dreams.





6

grammar — guided & free practice

Now use hedging language to talk about sleep and your own opinions.

Guided Practice**1.** Rewrite these confident statements as hedged statements:

“Naps improve focus.” → _____

“Dreams have meaning.” → _____

“Screens before bed ruin sleep quality.” → _____

2. With a partner, take turns making a claim about sleep and hedging it appropriately (e.g. “It’s thought that…”).**Free Practice****1. Speaking:** Describe one thing you learned today, using at least 2 hedging expressions.**2. Writing:** Write 4–5 sentences giving your own uncertain opinion about a sleep-related question (e.g. “Do dreams mean anything?”), using hedging language throughout.

The illustration is set against a warm, orange-toned background with a crescent moon and stars. It depicts a guided practice session between a man and a woman sitting at a table with books and mugs. The man says, “Naps improve focus.” (labeled CONFIDENT), and the woman responds with, “Naps **might** improve focus.” (labeled HEDGED). Below this, a section for FREE PRACTICE shows a man thinking, with icons for SPEAKING (a speech bubble) and WRITING (an open book and pen) connected by dotted lines.



7

discussion

Bring together everything from the video, article, and interview.



Dr. Voss debunked several sleep myths — which myth did you personally believe before this lesson?



What surprised you most out of the video, article, and interview?



How do your own sleep habits compare to what the research suggests is ideal?



If you could ask a sleep researcher one more question, what would it be?



Does learning about the glymphatic system change how you think about prioritizing sleep?

**homework**

Complete before the next lesson.

Part 1 — Vocabulary Review: Choose 6 of the 12 vocabulary words from this lesson and write one original sentence for each, connected to your own life or interests.

Part 2 — Grammar Practice (hedging language): Answer in full sentences, using at least one hedging expression each.

- What do you think happens in your brain while you sleep?
- Why might some people need more sleep than others?
- What could explain why you sometimes remember dreams and sometimes don't?
- How might poor sleep affect someone's daily life?
- What do you think is the biggest myth about sleep?
- Why might naps help or hurt someone's night sleep?

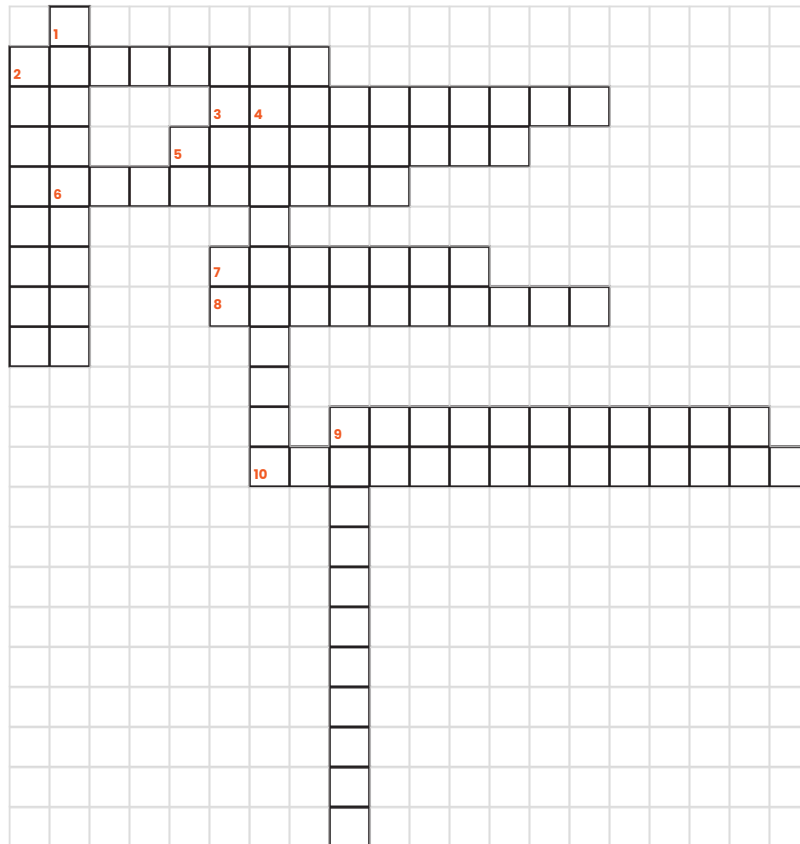
Part 3 — Communication Task (20–30 min): Record a 2–3 minute voice note (or write a short reflection) describing one thing you learned in this lesson. Use hedging language throughout (e.g. "It's thought that... which might explain why I...") and at least 4 vocabulary words from this lesson.



9

crossword

Use the clues below to complete the puzzle with vocabulary from this lesson.

**ACROSS**

1. Control (8)
2. Indicative (10)
3. Remaining (9)
4. Spinoff (9)
5. Prompt (7)
6. Brain-cleaning (10)
7. Link (11)
8. Pioneering (14)

DOWN

1. Chemical (9)
2. Investigation (8)
3. Fundamental (10)
4. Strengthen (11)

 Video Reference

This lesson's video section is based on **"A walk through the stages of sleep"** from TED's *Sleeping with Science* series, presented by sleep scientist Matt Walker. As this is copyrighted TED content, we are not able to reproduce the full script here. Please watch the original video at the link below before completing Section 2.

[youtube.com/watch?v=eM2VWspRpfk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM2VWspRpfk)

What's covered: Walker explains that human sleep is made up of two main types: non-REM sleep (four stages of increasing depth) and REM sleep. In deep non-REM sleep, the brain produces large, powerful waves, the immune system is recharged, and memories begin to consolidate. REM sleep brings vivid dreaming, faster brain wave activity, emotional processing, and a boost to creative problem-solving. These two types cycle roughly every 90 minutes throughout the night, but the ratio shifts — deep non-REM dominates the first half of the night, while REM becomes more prominent in the second half. This has a surprising consequence: someone who cuts their sleep short in the morning can lose a much larger share of their REM sleep than their total sleep time would suggest.

 **Audio Transcript**

Emma: So I want to start with one everyone asks about — can you actually “catch up” on sleep over the weekend?

Dr. Voss: It's a great question, and the honest answer is: partly, but not entirely. Sleeping in on Saturday might help you feel less groggy, but research suggests it doesn't fully reverse the effects of a week of short nights. Some of what you lose during the week doesn't seem to be fully recoverable just by sleeping longer once or twice.

Emma: That's disappointing. Okay, myth number two — everyone needs exactly eight hours, no exceptions.

Dr. Voss: That one's oversimplified. Eight hours is a reasonable average for most adults, but there's real individual variation. Some people do seem to function well on a bit less, though — and this is important — most people who say that are actually chronically under-slept and have just adjusted to feeling tired as normal.

Emma: So the eight-hour number isn't made up, but it's not universal either.

Dr. Voss: Exactly. It's a useful guideline, not a strict rule.

Emma: What about older adults needing less sleep? My grandmother always said that.

Dr. Voss: This is a common belief, but it appears to be more about sleep quality changing than the actual need for sleep decreasing. Older adults tend to sleep lighter and wake more often, so it can look like they need less — but the underlying requirement doesn't seem to drop nearly as much as people assume.

Emma: Interesting. Okay, one more — does warm milk before bed actually help you sleep?

Dr. Voss: [laughing] I get asked this constantly. There's no strong evidence that milk itself does much chemically. It might help through association, though — a warm drink, a calming routine, winding down. The ritual may matter more than the milk.

Emma: So it's basically a placebo with dairy.

Dr. Voss: That's a fair way to put it.

Emma: Last one, and this is the myth I hear the most — that some people just don't dream.

Dr. Voss: That one's almost certainly false. It's thought that everyone dreams multiple times a night, during REM sleep. What varies enormously is whether you remember it. If you wake up outside of REM sleep, the dream tends to vanish almost immediately. So it's not that some people don't dream — it's that some people just don't remember.

Emma: That actually explains so much. Okay, this has genuinely changed how I think about half these things.

Dr. Voss: That's usually how it goes. Sleep science is full of ideas that sound obvious until you actually look at the research.



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