

Dawn Simulator

A morning sunrise improves depression and energy

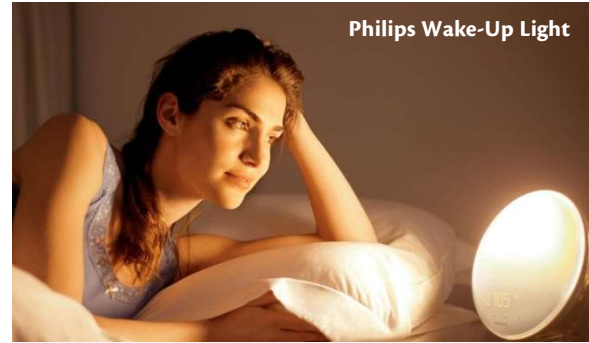
It's not natural to wake up to sound. Alarm clocks jolt people out of deep sleep, a very rude awakening. The brain works best when it is awakened by a gradual increase in sunlight, not a loud alarm. That's how people woke up before alarm clocks were invented some 500 years ago. A steady rise in morning light lifts the brain from deep sleep to light sleep to full awakening.

This matters in depression because of a little known symptom called sleep inertia. Sleep inertia makes it hard to shift from sleep to awakening, causing people to feel groggy and foggy headed for most of the morning.

A dawn simulator improves this problem by creating a virtual sunrise in your room, easing the transition from sleep to waking. The result is less depression and better energy and concentration throughout the day.

Choosing a Product

There are three types of dawn simulators. All-in-one products have built-in, long-lasting LED bulbs and programmable clocks. Alternatively, if you want to use your own lamp, use a smart bulb and program it to slowly turn on in the morning. There are also dawn simulator apps, which are great for travel but don't give off enough light to make a meaningful difference with everyday use.



If you like the look of your existing bedside lamp, you could use a device that slowly turns that lamp on. The downside of this is that it may not get bright enough (ideally 250 lux) to treat depression, and these timers won't work with energy-efficient bulbs. You can find other options on the back – including smart bulbs and apps – but these have not yet been clinically tested.

Lamps with timers	<p>TOP PICK Philips Morning Wake-Up Light HF3500, HF3510, HF3520: Recommended by the National Sleep Foundation, \$100.</p> <p>TOP PICK Lumie Bodyclock 100: Used in research, \$80.</p> <p>BUDGET Winshine Plus Wake Up or JALL Wake Up Light Sunrise Alarm Clock (\$30-40)</p>
Smart bulbs	These can be programmed to turn on gradually, e.g. Phillips Hue \$30 per bulb.
Apps	Idea for travel, but they don't give off enough light to lift mood. Rise & Shine, Lichtwecker, Dawn Simulator, and Gentle Wake Up for Android
<p>The easy choice Top products at www.moodtreatmentcenter.com/products</p>	

Temperature

Light is not the only signal that helps us wake up. A rise in morning temperature also gets the gears moving, and a cooler bedroom induces sleep. Program your thermostat to rise in the morning, about 1 hour before you plan to wake up.

Likewise, a drop in temperature signals sleep. Cold rooms deepen sleep quality. How cool? Sleep doctors recommend 60-65°

Fahrenheit. If you can't get it that cool, use a fan to cool down with convection.

Cooling mattresses are available that claim to lower the temp by up to 10 degrees, and there is some evidence that these improve sleep. Some models, like the BedJet, warm up in the morning.

Getting out of bed

A dawn simulator can wake you up, but it won't get you out of bed. If that last step is still difficult, consider a novel alarm clock like the ones at right.

Aromatherapy is a gentler approach. Mint, citrus, and rosemary help energy and alertness. Try plugging an oil diffuser into a programmable socket timer and set it to turn on 15 minutes before you wake up.

Music can also waken the senses. One study found that upbeat, melodic music improved mood and energy in the morning. Their top tracks were *Good Vibrations* by The Beach Boys and *Close to Me* by The Cure, but the best music is what pleases your ear:
moodtreatmentcenter.com/moodmusic

Further Reading

Brisk Awakening, a technique to reduce depression
moodtreatmentcenter.com/briskawakening

Blue light filters for insomnia and depression
moodtreatmentcenter.com/bluelight

—Chris Aiken, MD, adapted from
The Depression and Bipolar Workbook
 (Aiken, PESI Press, 2020)

Novel Alarm Clocks

Clocky	Clocky runs away as it sounds off, requiring you to get up and chase it down.
Smart Alarm Mat	An alarm that only turns off when you get out of bed and stand on a mat.
Shape Up Dumbbell Alarm Clock	A dumbbell-shaped alarm that will get you moving. It only shuts off after you've completed 30 curls.
IQ Alarm by Yanko	Requires you to answer a few brain teasers before shutting the alarm off.
Smile Alarms	Start your day with a smile. These apps require you to smile in your phone's camera before turning off: Rise & Shine, Smile Clock.
Sleep If U Can, Alarmy, Morning Routine	These apps require you to get up and scan or photograph objects in your house before their alarm shuts off.
Alarm Clock Xtreme, Mathe Alarm Clock, Puzzle Alarm	These app make you solve puzzles or math problems before turning off.
Wake N Shake	An app that only shuts off the alarm when you vigorously shake the phone.