The sleep-wake cycle is one of the clearest and critical examples of the importance of circadian rhythms.

During the day, light exposure causes the master clock to send signals that generate alertness and help keep us awake and active. As night falls, the master clock initiates the production of melatonin, a hormone that promotes sleep, and then keeps transmitting signals that help us stay asleep through the night.

In this way, our circadian rhythm aligns our sleep and wakefulness with day and night9 to create a stable cycle of restorative rest that enables increased daytime activity.