

# Your Body Clock

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## What is your body clock?

Your body clock is your own personal timekeeper. It helps keep your body running on a 24-hour cycle that fits in with the Earth's day-night cycle. Your body clock tells your brain and body to exercise, do focused work, eat and sleep.

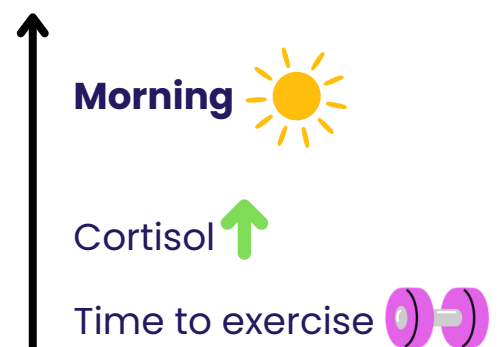
Your main body clock is in your brain and it sends messages to lots of smaller clocks throughout your body.

Everyone's body clock is slightly different. Everything you do, from when you eat, when you do exercise, when you rest, helps keep your body clock healthy. Learning about your own body clock's schedule and sticking to routines that work for you are best for your mood, energy and overall health.

## A day in the life of your body clock

**As the sun rises**, the light sends a signal to your body clock saying it is time to wake up. Your body produces lots of cortisol in the **morning**, which is a hormone that helps increase your energy and attention. This is why mornings are often our most productive time of day.

Physical activity sends important messages to the main body clock in your brain. Getting up and being active at the same time each day helps keep your body clock in sync, helping your brain to wake up and become energetic in the morning.



Our gut and metabolic systems are also more active **during the day**, when we are most likely to eat and need energy. Eating regularly also helps to keep your body clock in sync, as your stomach sends messages to your main body clock.

In the **early afternoon** you may experience a dip in energy as your cortisol levels drop.

**After dark**, the body clock lowers your temperature, and the sleep hormone melatonin rises, telling your body that it is time for sleep. This is an important time to be mindful of activities that can disrupt your sleep. For example, blue light from digital devices like your phone can suppress melatonin which makes it harder to fall asleep. Vigorous activity at the end of the day and eating late at night can also disrupt your body's natural rhythms. Having a regular bedtime and sleep routine where you put devices away can improve your sleep. Be sure to check out all the strategies for keeping a consistent sleep schedule in the 'Minding Your Mind' app. Just look for the 'Reset your body clock section' in the 'Explore' menu.

**Once you are asleep** your body clock tells the rest of your body to rest and recover, restarting the cycle in preparation for tomorrow. Your energy levels are at their lowest during the night.

**Daytime** 

Eating healthy and regularly 

High energy! 

**Afternoon** 

Lower energy 

Cortisol 

**Evening** 

Melatonin 

Turn off devices 

**Nighttime** 

Rest and recover 

## The body clock and your mental health

The body clock has a big impact on all the functions of the body, including your mental health. If you don't look after your body clock it can get out of sync, leading to all sorts of physical and mental health problems. This can include severe forms of depression.

When your body clock is out of sync you can feel:

- Tired all day
- Moody and irritable
- Less alert

Physical impacts of an out-of-sync body clock can look like:

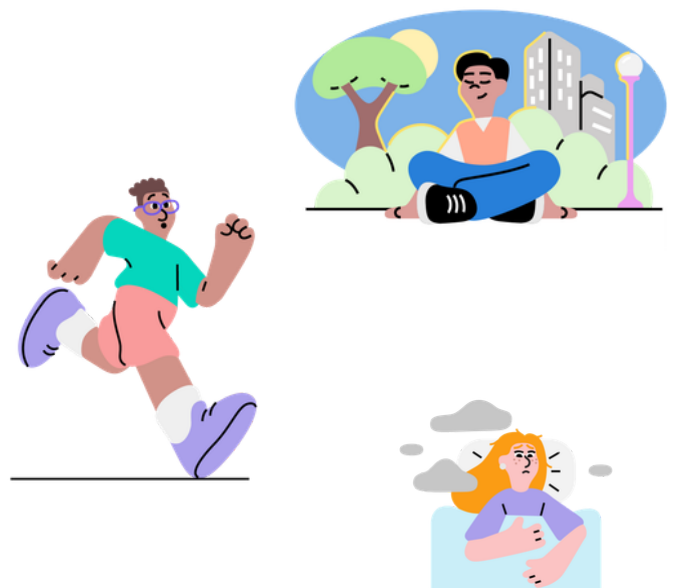
- Increased appetite
- Increased insulin resistance
- Headaches
- Gut problems
- Muscle pains
- Increased risk of viral infections
- Increased risk of heart attack or stroke

## Ways you can look after your body clock

To set our body clock, we need to signal to our brain that the day has begun.

The three best ways to do this are:

1. Getting exposure to natural light first thing in the morning
2. Doing 30 minutes of exercise in the morning
3. Waking up at the same time every day



Exposure to natural light in the morning sends a strong signal to our brain that the day has begun. This makes sure our body turns off the sleep hormone melatonin.

**Do**

- Go outside three times a day for at least 30 minutes in the morning, at midday, and at twilight.
- Open your blinds in the morning to let sunlight in.

**Don't**

- Use digital screens right before bed, as this can signal to the brain that it is time to get going instead of winding down.
- Opt for artificial light instead of natural light in the morning.

Movement also indicates to our brain that the day has begun. You should aim to start moving as soon as you have woken up.

**Do**

- Get up and get moving!
- Find ways to integrate movement into your morning, like walking past your normal bus stop to the next one on the way to work or school.

**Don't**

- Stay in bed a long time after waking up.
- Spend time scrolling in bed right after waking up.

Your body clock likes regularity. You can keep your body clock healthy by doing things at a similar time each day.

**Do**

- Wake up at a similar time each day (yes, even on weekends!).
- Get settled for bed at a similar time each day.
- Try to engage in exercise at the same time each morning.

**Don't**

- Try to catch up on sleep by sleeping in. Sticking to your schedule lets your body clock catch up on its own.
- Turn off your alarm and go back to sleep.
- Take long naps or naps in the evening.