



What is your circadian rhythm?

Words: Lucy Waterlow

How to manage your body clock to maximise energy

It may sound like an indie band you'd find on a small stage at a festival, but 'circadian rhythm' actually refers to our internal body clocks. Scholars going back to ancient times have studied the process our bodies go through in a 24-hour period from day to night, with the word circadian derived from the Latin for 'around' (circa) and 'day' (dies). A physiologist called Franz Halberg is thought to have been the first to coin the term circadian rhythm in 1959 – and being attuned to yours could make a big difference to your energy levels.

Bonnie Ryckova, a chronic pain rehab specialist (bonnierickova.com) explains: "Your circadian rhythm is a 24-hour internal clock, also known as your sleep/wake cycle, which helps regulate virtually every major system in your body. Not just sleep, but digestion, temperature, hormones, mood, immune function, and even aspects of muscle tone and coordination. This rhythm evolved to keep us in sync with the natural cycles of light and dark – preparing our bodies to be alert and active during daylight, and to recover and repair overnight."

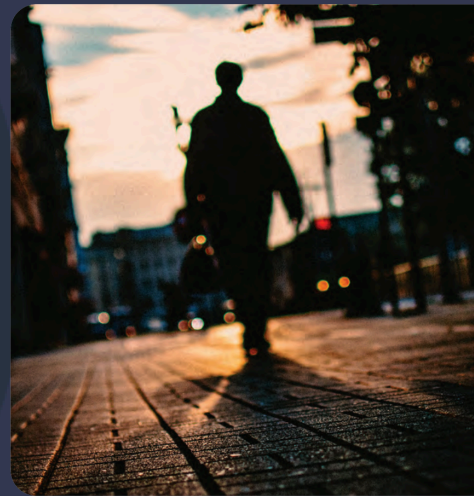
30 DAYS TO **Boost Your Energy**

Lots of us will have felt the repercussions of being out of sync with our body clocks at one time or another; for example, when up in the early hours feeding a newborn baby, staying out late partying and then sleeping in until lunchtime, or getting up mega early to catch a flight. The following day you can feel extremely fatigued and disorientated with brain fog and headaches. These scenarios are usually infrequent, and you can get back on track to feel better again. But Bonnie says that when people are regularly inadvertently out of tune with their body clocks it can create a lingering "mystery fatigue" or "nagging tiredness".

"This is not always serious enough for a diagnosis, but persistent enough to affect daily life," she says. "As someone who works with clients experiencing persistent joint and back tension and pain, I often see these symptoms present in people who otherwise seem to be 'doing everything right,'" Bonnie continues. "Sometimes, what's missing isn't another supplement or stretch – it's their natural body clock. Aligning our

daily activities with our circadian rhythm can enhance productivity and overall health and wellbeing."

Modern lifestyles can often be to blame for having an irregular body clock. For example, our ancestors might have been able to get up at sunrise to start their day, but we often have to be up before it is light (particularly in the winter) to get to work or to exercise. In the summer, we might need to sleep in for longer when the sun comes up very early. Furthermore, while they could wind down with few evening distractions, we might be scrolling on our phones, staying up late watching TV, or doing high intensity workouts after dark at the gym. This can all inhibit a good night's sleep. ■



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Four simple ways to support your circadian rhythm



1 Go to bed and get up at the same time each day. Certain events or travel plans might mean you can't go to bed and wake up at exactly the same time every day of the year. But if you can do so for as many as possible – for example, by not altering your sleeping patterns too drastically on weekends compared to week days – then you will be giving your body essential consistency.



2 Eat at the same times, too. As with your bedtime and morning routine, if you can aim to eat your meals at around the same time each day it will help regulate your blood sugar, insulin and hormones throughout the day. This way, you will be more likely to avoid afternoon energy slumps, which should make it easier for you to nod off when you go to bed.



3 Avoid screens late at night. Your body clock responds to natural light, so you will cause confusion if you expose yourself to the bright lights of a mobile, laptop or TV screen too close to bedtime. Turn down the brightness if you can or, even better, swap screens for a book or magazine to regulate your hormones and help you wind down more easily.



4 Get some natural sunlight in the morning. This will help both your body and mind to wake up and feel more energised for the day ahead. Go for a walk, run, or bike ride, or just sit in your garden and soak up the rays. You can still gain the benefit of being outside in natural light even on grey days. Plus, you'll get a bonus hit of Vitamin D if you're outside more often.