

Lloyd's Wellbeing Centre

Is lockdown making you feel tired? Do you lack the energy to carry you through the day?
Get your sleep back on track and feel the improvements!

The past month has presented all of us with unprecedented new challenges, both physically and psychologically.

We want you to stay fit and well during this crisis, so we've lined up a great panel of Health and Wellbeing experts to bring you practical tips and advice on a weekly basis.

This issue focuses on sleep:

- Link between **sleep and mental wellbeing**
- **Routine** - the guardian of sleep
- The **sleep / wake cycle**
- To **nap or not to nap**, that is the question!
- **Sleep hygiene**
- Keeping a **sleep diary**
- 10 steps to **relaxation**



For many, the events in recent weeks have played havoc with our sleep patterns.

Problems with sleep come in a myriad of forms; from not being able to fall asleep, to intermittently waking up in the night and feeling exhausted in the morning due to a restless night.

There are, of course, multiple reasons why our sleep patterns are being knocked off-kilter. In this issue and ones to follow, we will be offering you advice to help you identify these reasons, and top tips to get your sleep back on track.

Currently, life feels a little surreal - as if we are living through a fast-moving movie, with each of us being affected by the film script in a myriad of different ways. We are having to deal physically and mentally to rapid changes to our daily lives at breakneck speed. Energy levels have been depleted, and familiar work/commute/home routines have been destroyed, resulting in lines being blurred between work and rest times.

It's common knowledge that a major contributor to sleep problems is mental stress, anxiety and worry. This can become a sleep/stress merry-go-round as, in turn, if you have a poor night's sleep it can affect your mental wellbeing and possibly make you irritable and less able to cope with stress and anxiety. This becomes a vicious circle where one exacerbates the other.

In summary, because of the integral links between quality sleep and mental wellbeing; by focusing on improving either of these key areas of wellbeing you automatically improve the other.

So let's get going!





There is a varied approach to the management of our new lives during lockdown. Some of us have successfully devised and maintained new, adapted routines whilst many of us are still all over the place with the way we run our day. Often knocked off the rails by home-working related disruptions.

For many of us, life has changed quite dramatically overnight. The commute to and from work gave structure to our daily routine, allowed us time outside in natural light and helped us separate work from leisure. With the commute gone, many of us are waking later, working as soon as we look at our phones and possibly having meals at different times than we are used to.

On top of these changes, we are having to intermittently deal with the distractions associated with lockdown life throughout the working day, such as juggling domestic duties, dealing with kids, or trying to organise the food shop.

Set up a routine and stick to it

Your body prefers a structured day; getting into a regular daily routine is vital to reset your body clock. This provides time cues throughout the day to influence your circadian rhythm and help you get a good night's sleep.

It may sound simple, but as a basic rule: wake up and go to sleep at the same time and have your meals and breaks around the same time each day.



Exercise time

It's essential that you really try and get at least half an hour of exercise per day, preferably earlier rather than later in the day. Try not to exercise near to your bedtime as this just gets your system invigorated, which isn't ideal when you are trying to calm yourself down and get yourself in the mood for sleeping.

Time out time, wind down time

You may have other family members such as children that you need to help organise in your household or you may be just looking after yourself. What's important is to ensure you get some time for yourself to relax and wind down from the day.

Reduce your screen time as you get closer to bedtime and try not to watch adrenaline fuelled, edge-of-your-seat box sets just prior to bedtime! Switch to something you enjoy like light reading, stretching or listening to a podcast, as you get closer to sleep time. Relaxing will signal to your body clock to release hormones that reduce alertness, begin to wind you down and prepare you for bed.



Natural light time

Try and combine your break times with getting natural light whenever and however you can! If you are lucky enough to have a garden, then make use of it or sit by a sunny window or balcony. Make the most of your outside exercise time and trips for essential shopping!



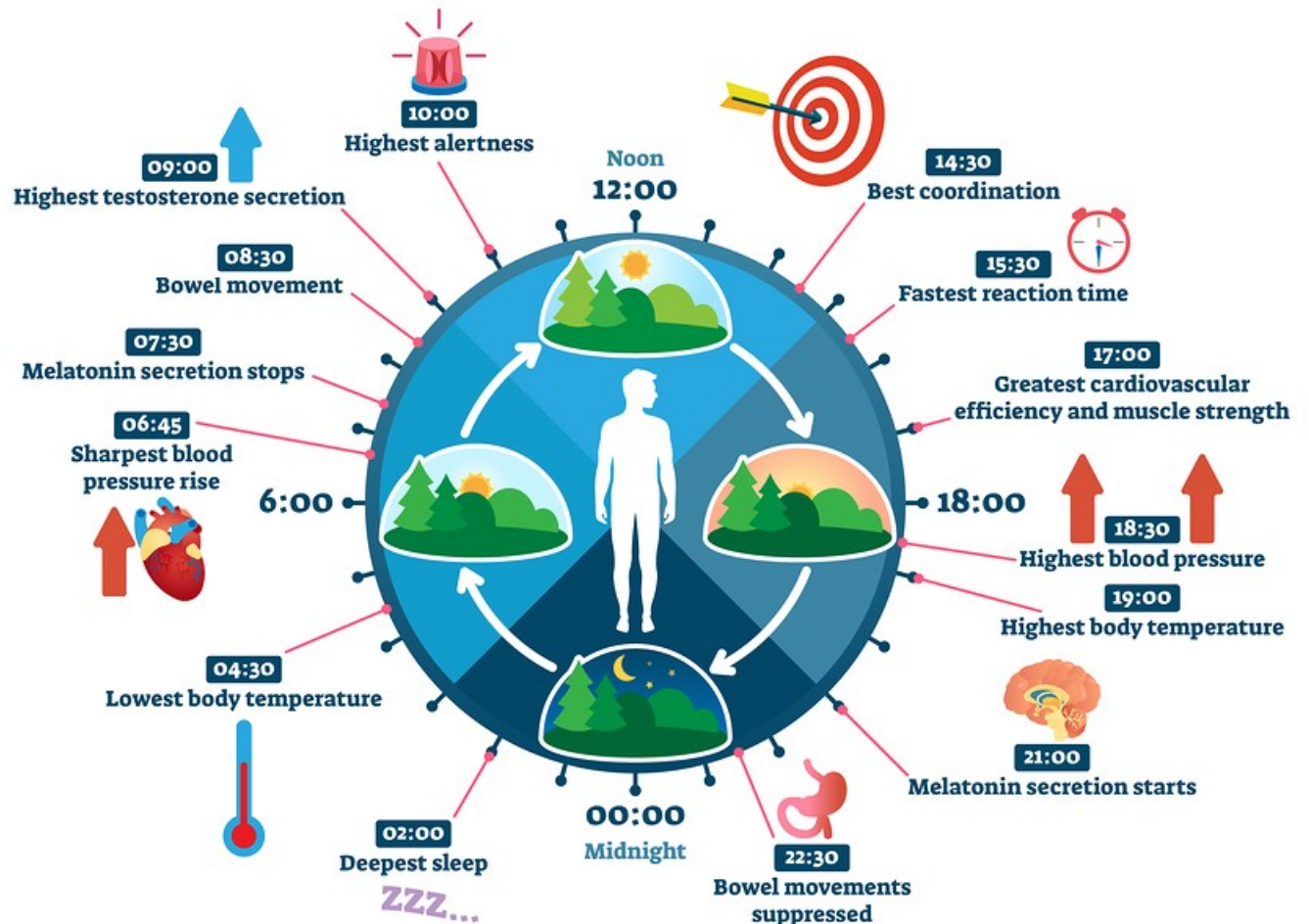
Sticking to a daily routine will give you a personal sense of achievement, control and satisfaction in these unusual times.

-
- Wake-up time
 - Breakfast time
 - Exercise time (am or pm?)
 - Home commitments - children/family (am or pm or both)
 - Shower & dress, ready for day
 - am work time
 - am break time
 - Lunch time
 - pm work time
 - pm break-time
 - Dinner time
 - Schedule your evening wind-down time
 - Getting ready for bedtime
 - Bedtime, light's off time

Changes to our routine can have a real impact on our sleep patterns, as our daily routine has an integral relationship with what is known as our circadian rhythm or internal master 'body clock'.

Our circadian rhythms play a key role in regulating our sleep pattern; waking us up, keeping us awake, and making us tired at near enough the same time every evening. The phrase comes from the Latin *Circa* (around) and *dies* (day).

- Our circadian rhythm rises and dips at different times in the day. It's set to a schedule of approximately 24 hours (but varies slightly in each of us). The cycle is governed by a small group of brain cells located in the hypothalamus (above optic nerves) called the suprachiasmatic nucleus.
- This master body clock controls our body temperature and hormones and makes us feel alert during the day and tired at night.
- The uncertainty of our current times is increasing our stress levels which stimulates the releases of stress hormones such as cortisol, which plays a significant role in regulating our natural circadian rhythm which in turn regulates our sleep. Cortisol levels are naturally higher in the morning (to help get you up) and drop off in the evening.
- Maintaining a daily routine has a big influence on regulating your circadian rhythm which in turn helps you to sleep. The two most powerful forces that influence the calibration of our circadian rhythm are natural light and regular mealtimes. It's been shown that having a regular wake-up time is also important as this provides an 'anchor' for your body clock.



This strange epoch we are going through has forced us to significantly change the way we run our day.

Apart from front-line or essential workers who leave home to go to work, the rest of us are either working, studying or furloughed at home, or not working. Entwined with these changes there is the pressure of home life; some of us managing children, running the domestic grind of laundry, meals and general house maintenance. Oh yes - and trying to maintain our own physical and mental wellbeing!

It is no wonder that we feel tired during the day from the stresses of battling to adapt to our new regimes; it's also because we have become more sedentary. Our body associates our much-lowered activity, such as sitting for long periods in front of screens and the TV, with going to sleep.

Of course, having a power nap during the day is not everyone's 'thing', but for some, the seductive lure of the couch for a bit of shut eye, or a doze on the comfy armchair can be very tempting.

Napping is great if it works for you, as it can give you a much-needed energy boost during the day if you find yourself flagging. The problem with daytime napping is that it reduces what is called your 'sleep drive', especially if you partake in the habit in the latter part of the day. So, if you are struggling to get your night-time sleep patterns back on track, it's well worth trying to resist naps or keep them short – say 20 mins max, which should be enough to restore your mental and physical energy.



There have been many famous nappers throughout history including Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, John F Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt and Leonardo da Vinci.



If you are struggling with sleep at the moment, have you looked at how your bedroom could be affecting your quality of sleep?

There are lots of easy fixes that could improve your 'sleep hygiene', and most are cheap and simple. Try some of these suggestions and see your sleep improve.

Curtains: Use thick or lined curtains to help cut out unwanted light and outside noise.

Lighting: Dim the lights or use lamps or uplighters instead of bright ceiling lights for around 2 hours before you go to bed. You should also avoid blue-light from screens during this time. A dimmable bedside lamp will also be beneficial.

Tech: The bedroom should be a place of sleep and relaxation. Keep smartphones, tablets and laptops out of the bedroom at night. Use a separate alarm clock if you normally rely on your smartphone to wake you up. The bedroom should be a TV-free zone.

Temperature: You may sleep better in a cooler room, aim for a temperature of 19°C.

Wear loose fitting clothing to bed: Loose fitting clothing can help you produce more melatonin, a hormone produced by the body to help us sleep.

Bedding: Aim for layers of natural fibres, as they are breathable and allow your body temperature to self-regulate. Also consider a weighted blanket, which distributes weight evenly over your body and may help to relieve pain, lessen anxiety and improve mood.

Make your bed each day and frequently change bedding.

Clear the clutter: To make your bedroom as restful as possible, clear clutter and keep it tidy. Mess will only remind us of chores left undone.

Pillows: One pillow should be sufficient for support; this puts your head in an optimum position for breathing through your nose and allowing you to inhale more air as you sleep.

You may also like to try putting an extra pillow under your knees to improve your posture if you like to sleep on your back. If you sleep on your front, you may find that you don't even require a pillow at all.

Mattress: Finding the right mattress is essential for a good night's sleep. If you are not happy with your mattress, some online retailers offer a 100 night trial or you could consider a mattress topper as an interim fix. (It is appreciated that current COVID restrictions mean it's not possible to go out and test new mattresses.)



Changing habits and starting a new routine can feel like a huge challenge! One way to really explore how you are sleeping and what may be affecting your sleep is to keep a sleep diary. This will help you discover your sleeping habits and identify common factors which may be causing problems. It is much easier to find a solution once you know the cause of sleeplessness.

How will a sleep diary help me?

There are lots of tips on how to achieve a good night's sleep, however, everyone is different and it's hard to know what is right for you before understanding your own sleep patterns. If you have been experiencing problems with sleep for some time, it may seem easier to just accept that is the way you sleep and not put effort into changing your habits. However, keeping a sleep diary will really help highlight patterns, identify problems and what is causing them.

The sleep diary asks the same questions each day but don't put too much pressure on yourself to answer every question in full, just answer it as best you can. For instance, you might not recall what woke you in the night, but if you remember anything at all, write it down and you may notice a pattern, which you can act on to start making positive changes.

Try to find time each day (preferably each morning) to focus on considering and completing your sleep diary, so that any issues are fresh in your mind. It can be tricky to remember specifics if you are completing a few days at a time. Women may also find it helpful to make a note of their menstrual dates, to see if hormonal changes are affecting sleep.

At the end of each week, look back at how the week has gone and complete the weekly summary section with any noteworthy observations. As the weeks go on, you may notice that you find it harder to relax on certain days of the week, or after eating certain foods, or that you sleep better on days that you have exercised more.

Once common issues and positive changes have been identified, these can be entered on the final page of 'Your Sleep Solutions' – these habit changes will aid a restful and restorative night's sleep.



Download your Sleep Diary Template

The [sleep diary template](#) will get you started, but feel free to add any further questions that you feel would be helpful. We suggest completing the diary for 4 weeks, by which time, you should be noticing some positive changes.

www.lloyds wellbeingcentre.co.uk/sleep-diary/

A small thumbnail image of the Sleep Diary Template. It shows a grid with columns for 'Date', 'Time to bed', 'Time to wake', 'Sleep quality', 'Mood', 'Stress', 'Caffeine', 'Alcohol', 'Exercise', and 'Notes'. The grid is designed to be filled out over a 4-week period.

Try this 10-step body scan to relax and relieve stress

1 Lay down on the floor or on a bed. You should be face-up with your arms by your side and legs stretched out. Take time to feel the contact of each body part on the surface you are laying on. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, imagine your body melting into the floor or bed.

2 Think about the breath in your abdomen. It may help to put one hand on your stomach to focus your attention on the expansion and contraction of each breath. If your concentration wanders, or you find it difficult at any point during the body scan, return your thoughts to your breathing until you feel focused again.

3 With your arms back by your side, move your focus from your abdomen down through your right leg into your right foot. Think about the toes on your right foot. Do they feel hot or cold? Is there anything else that you feel in or around your toes? Take your time to consider how your body feels, and how you feel.

4 Move your focus from your toes down to the sole, to the heel and up to the top of your foot, then to your whole foot, taking time to notice and consider any sensations you feel.

5 Return your thoughts to your breath and picture yourself guiding your breath into and out of your right foot, imagining your foot inhaling and exhaling. Continue for a few breaths.



6 Release your focus from your right foot and let it travel to your lower right leg, following the same process of considering the sensations.

7 Continue moving your focus up your right leg. When you reach the top, again focus on your breath and picture yourself inhaling and exhaling, spanning up and down your whole right leg.

8 Repeat this process round your whole body. You may prefer to split your body into sections, or focus on individual parts. Make sure you include every part of your body, including back, chest, neck, and individual elements of your face.

9 When you are happy that you have scanned your whole body, return your focus to your breath again. Picture yourself breathing in through the soles of your feet, up to the top of your head and back, and then out again from the top of your toes.

10 Finally, take time to feel the contact of your body with the surface you are laying on.