

The body clock



Guidance on how to keep your sleep cycle in time.

Did you know?

We all have an internal body clock, which is called the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN), located deep in our brain. The body clock controls all the biological rhythms in our body, including the release of hormones, our metabolism and even our body temperature. These biological rhythms follow a pattern (the circadian rhythm) and are tied to the pattern of night and day.

Our body clock uses environmental cues, such as exposure to daylight and daily routines, to keep our sleep cycle in line with the time zone we live in.



If you travel to a different time zone, such as America, you get jet lag. Jet lag is when your internal body clock is out of alignment with the time zone you are visiting. Jet lag can make you feel unwell, including headaches, problems with your ability to concentrate, your digestion, and emotional regulation. You may feel unwell until your internal body clock adjusts.

There is a change in the teenage body clock, which makes it harder to fall asleep earlier in the evening and a tendency to sleep and wake later. A lack of daily routine and reduced exposure to daylight and daytime activities can make this situation worse, and young people sometimes end up sleeping in the daytime rather than at night. This can result in jet lag symptoms.

So, sleeping at nighttime is important to keep our body clock in line and for our physical and mental health!



Top tips tool kit

Simple changes to our evening and morning routines can help keep our body clock in time and make it easier to fall asleep.

Establish a bedtime routine: This is key in helping our brain prepare for sleep

- See separate guidance sheets on devices, noise and bedtime routines.

Establish a set morning routine:

- Agree on a reasonable morning wake up time and stick to it each day. This anchors the body clock and helps keep it in line with the time zone we live in.
- Open the curtains, and, if necessary, turn on the lights to reinforce the signals that daytime has begun.
- Get washed or showered and changed out of sleep clothes, even if you are staying indoors. If possible, go for a short walk outside.
- All these small steps help to anchor the body clock and help with settling to sleep.

This information aims to broaden understanding of factors impacting on sleep, offering general tips as a framework for families. It is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or parental preference or responsibility.

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