

Words of Wellness



October 2021

Rhythms-

Everyone experiences daily rhythms. These are related to human biology, our surrounding environment, and a few personal factors. These are called *circadian* rhythms, meaning “about a day.” There are some common patterns and many individual variations in rhythm. The common patterns are based on our body’s circadian clock.

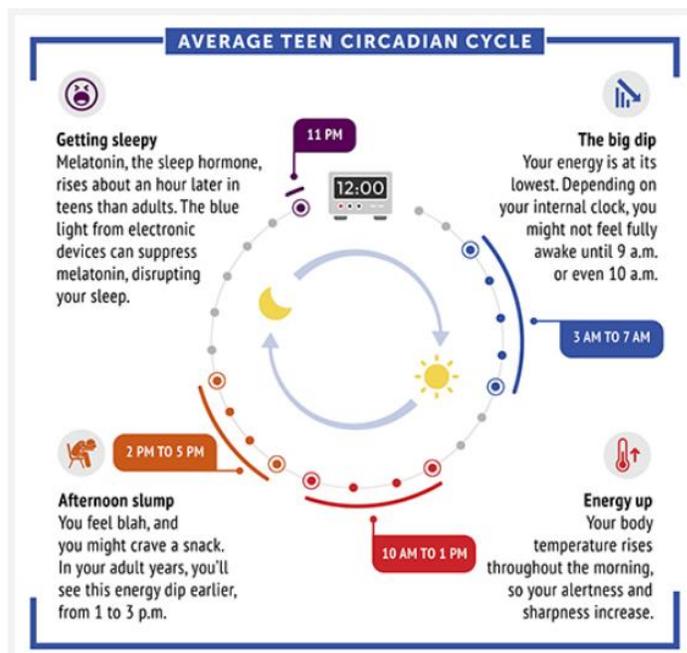
You might think our internal clocks are set for a 24-hour day. The clock really is *about* a day, not *exactly* a day. Research has demonstrated that our human circadian clocks run closer to 24 hours and 15 minutes (on average) and need to be reset to fit the reality of 24 hours.

The biggest factor that naturally resets our clocks is exposure to light. Light in the early morning tends to set our clocks back (closer to 24 hours) and light late in the day tends to set our clocks ahead (longer than 24 hours). Other factors can mess with our clocks, too, like caffeine.

Our circadian rhythms include our sleep-wake patterns, our attention and concentration, our digestive system, our body temperature, and our hormone levels. Individual rhythms vary. You are probably familiar with the idea of night owls who stay up late and larks who tend to wake up early. These are examples of individual differences in circadian rhythms.

In addition to individual differences in circadian rhythms, our patterns do change over time. For example, young children often wake early, teens tend to stay up late at night, and older people often shift back to earlier wake-up times. These changes are common and have a biological basis.

Understanding our circadian rhythms can help us organize our days to match and support our natural cycles. This will help keep us healthy and focused throughout the day and may help support good quality sleep at night.



Leaves by Elsie N. Brady

How silently they tumble down
And come to rest upon the ground
To lay a carpet, rich and rare,
Beneath the trees without a care,
Content to sleep, their work well done,
Colors gleaming in the sun.

At other times, they wildly fly
Until they nearly reach the sky.
Twisting, turning through the air
Till all the trees stand stark and bare.
Exhausted, drop to earth below
To wait, like children, for the snow.



Small Steps to A Wellness Journey -

Lauren

In life, I believe it is totally normal to have many slumps that you inevitably will overcome. Throughout the pandemic, these slumps have seemed to be more heightened, considering we have less ability to escape our reality, and are forced to face it head on. With the pandemic persisting, finding more balance in terms of my mental health made it a bit easier to cope with these constant changes that seem to keep happening regardless of common conception.

Making small but impactful changes has helped me cope with the constant changing of the pandemic, such as new changing eating habits, daily routines, sleeping habits, and more.

I needed to look at small things I could do to keep my mental health balanced. For me, it is based around food and my daily routine. When I don't eat nourishingly, or I eat at odd times, and when I lie around all day doing nothing, my mental health suffers.

So, for me, something I work on every day is trying to force myself to wake up at a reasonable hour and eat breakfast as soon as possible.

This has helped me create more balance in my life and, once I get that most difficult task of my daily life out of the way, I have more room to focus on the other aspects of my wellness journey. Now I could focus on fixing my circadian rhythm, grounding exercises, and practicing mindfulness in my everyday life.

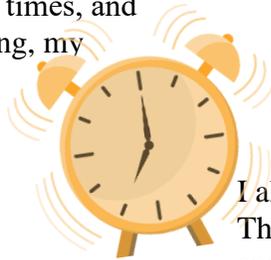
While this one challenge may not be so clear to others, sometimes it is a little bit deeper than a surface level challenge. Sometimes it may be a fear, a relationship, past trauma, or multiple of all the above. Learning to recognize which specific area of your life is most impacted can help you break away from harmful habits.



While we all struggle with trauma in one way or another, and it often affects multiple areas of our lives, it usually impacts one area of our life more than others.

After recognizing your area of struggle, self-reflection comes into play. Reflecting on the habits you had in this one area, and how you want to change them to be healthier and more sustainable, can help you to do this in other areas of your life. As I mentioned before, one area of struggle was food. I started incorporating new recipes and healthier habits to try and feel more in control of my life.

I have found that focusing on one area helps me create other healthier habits. So, for me, once I had identified what was making my life more difficult, I started trying those new recipes I liked that made me feel good and ate at certain time periods of the day so that I felt the best.



I also learned to gain an appreciation for my food. This made me more excited every day to eat, appreciating that I am fortunate since others do not have that same privilege. I focused on one area of my life that I struggled with and have slowly started to overcome it. I am now carrying this into other areas in my life as well. I now only nourish myself with music, people, and activities that make me feel good, and are not harmful. By focusing on toxic habits, such as poor sleeping and eating choices, I am now able to recognize when other aspects of my life have toxic patterns as well, like in friendships, studying, relationships, and more. This has overall helped my personal growth, as well as my wellness journey to help identify what is enriching my life, and what is not.

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Small Steps to A Wellness Journey *continued from page 2*

By focusing more on one thing, and being mindful around my eating habits, I have now been able to carry those healthy habits over into other areas of my life I had previously struggled with. Food was a huge factor in my poor mental health, not knowing how to shop or cook foods was impacting my life a lot.

By exploring new habits and routines around my diet, I was able to piece together other areas of my routine, which has greatly impacted my quality of life. By identifying your area of struggle, you may be able to change the path of your wellness journey and improve your quality of life.

Daily Wellness Self-Care Routines **Strengthen Mental Health-** *Lauren*

Changing your diet, starting a new gym regimen, cutting out toxic relationships, and developing hobbies can be beneficial for your overall wellness. Making changes that focus on mental health is important. Adding in a morning routine, night-time routine, mid-day meditations, or even some light daily exercise can significantly impact your mood.

Something that I have noticed through my personal mental health journey is that getting up earlier than normal, and even just drinking a glass of cold water before I go on my phone, has increased my daily productivity, mood, and reduced anxiety. Getting through the pandemic has been stressful. However it has given me the chance to be more mindful of the important wellness self-care routines that strengthen my mental health.

I'm not the only one who found that the stress of the pandemic affected my sleep and my other daily routines. I was unable to enjoy food like I

used to and had no motivation to work out or even get up to wash my face.

Soon realizing that this path is unsustainable, I decided to start practicing self-care to improve my wellness journey. I needed to establish healthy routines that fit with my natural circadian rhythm.

I created a simple morning routine that included getting up and drinking water, before looking at my phone. I also do deep breathing for a few minutes. By starting my day being mindful, and doing something that benefits me, and only me, I was able to develop better wellness habits throughout my day. I started my day by taking 5 minutes at the start of the day to ground myself.

Every time I have done this, I end up having more time and motivation to make myself a nourishing breakfast, get dressed in an outfit I enjoy, and sometimes go for a walk as well. This leaves me feeling more energized. Grounding myself in the mornings helps me be more aware of the natural ups and downs in my energy and focus throughout the day. I am learning to fit my daily activities into these natural rhythms, which makes me more productive.

I created a nighttime routine as well. A simple skin-care routine with a cleanser, serum, and moisturizer so I feel cleaner and more productive before bed. I make sure I go to bed when I am ready to go to sleep. I try to do some short meditations before bed to calm my thoughts and help get rid of the day's stress. I have created a habit of adding the grounding when I get home. Grounding myself through the day helps me enjoy my meals and enjoy other aspects of my day as well, like spending time with friends and family, going in nature, playing with my pets, and more.

Starting and ending my day with calm quality time for myself keeps me mindful of how I feel. Better awareness of my circadian rhythms means I can adjust my daily routines to fit better with my circadian rhythms. This internal communication between my mind and body has a positive impact on the quality of my life and is helping me on my overall wellness journey.

Celebrate Every Day in October!

National Go On A Field Trip Month

Go somewhere local or take a virtual trip to a museum or national park. Have a conversation about where you have gone, where you would like to go, and why you'd want to go there.

Positive Attitude Month

Draw a “mood feeling” picture. Describe your own drawing to a group, then discuss how everyone feels during specific situations.

Celebrate for a whole week!

The week of October 3-9 is Get Organized Week as well as International Postcard Week and National Carry A Tune Week.

Celebrate for a day!

- Oct. 1 World Smile Day
- Oct. 2 World Card Making Day
- Oct. 5 National Do Something Nice Day
- Oct. 6 National Pumpkin Seed Day
- Oct. 7 You Matter To Me Day
- Oct. 9 Universal Music Day
- Oct. 31 National Knock-Knock Jokes Day



National Oatmeal Day

On October 29th, we hope you'll join us in celebrating National Oatmeal Day! Oatmeal is a healthy grain with lots of soluble fiber, making it a great choice for breakfast or even a snack! There are many other ways to enjoy oats, including muesli, oatmeal muffins, overnight oatmeal, and oatmeal cookies.

Gluten-free? No problem—just look for oats that are marked as gluten-free, to ensure they are handled properly when processed and tested.

References and Resources

Thanks to our regular contributor Lauren Dick for articles included for this month. Unless otherwise cited, illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution from pixabay.com

- Learn more about the circadian clock at <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/longhourstraining/clock.html>
- The image of the teen circadian rhythm is from <https://nigms.nih.gov/education/fact-sheets/Pages/Circadian-Rhythms.aspx>
- For a comprehensive look at sleep: Walker, M. (2017). *Why we sleep*. NY, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- You can learn about whether you are an owl or a lark or a mix at <https://chronotype-self-test.info/index.php?sid=61524&newtest=Y> and <https://www.danpink.com/resource/when-larks-owls-and-third-birds/>
- For more poems, visit the Poetry Foundation website: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>
- Learn more about National Oatmeal Day (and other fun days to celebrate) at: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-oatmeal-day/>
- You can find many oat recipes, including overnight oatmeal, at the Quaker Oats website (<https://www.quakeroats.com/cooking-and-recipes/overnight-oats>) and on the Bob's Red Mill blog: <https://www.bobsredmill.com/blog/recipes/simple-overnight-oats/>
- Search for postcards at the Smithsonian Postal Museum <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/> and the Chicago Postcard Museum <http://www.chicagopostcardmuseum.org/> or send an e-postcard from the High Museum in Atlanta, GA: <https://high.org/e-postcards/>
- *Knock Knock. Who's there? A broken pencil. A broken pencil who? Never mind, it's pointless.* 😊