

Words of Wellness



October 2023

Our Daily 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.

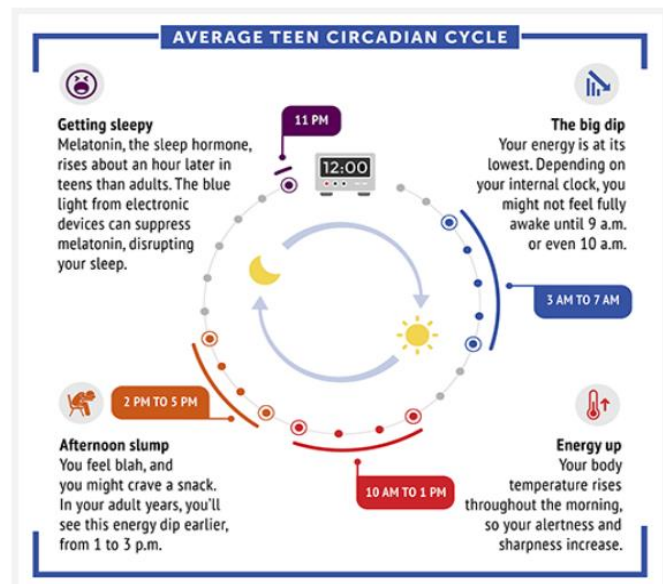
You might think our internal clocks are set for a 24-hour day. The clock really is *about* a day, not *exactly* a day. Research has demonstrated that our human circadian clocks run closer to 24 hours and 15 minutes (on average) and need to be reset to fit the reality of 24 hours.

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.



Small Steps to Wellness - Lauren

In life, I believe it is totally normal to have many slumps that you inevitably will overcome. Throughout the pandemic, these slumps seemed to be more heightened, considering we have less ability to escape our reality, and are forced to face it head on. As the pandemic persisted, 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 chaos. I've done this through developing new habits, such as changing current eating habits, creating daily routines, adjusting my sleep, and more!

I needed to look at the 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 if I eat at odd times!) my mental health suffers. Not having a routine and, instead, lying about all day also puts stress upon my mental health.

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!

Doing so has helped me create a better balance in my life and works well for me – After all, once I get that most difficult task out of the way, I have more room to focus on the other aspects of my wellness journey and daily living. I can now shift focus to on fixing my circadian rhythm, grounding exercises, and practicing mindfulness in my everyday life!



While this one seemingly simple task may not come off as a “challenge” to others, the truth is there is depth to this challenge that goes beyond the surface level. Every person could have their own battle behind a challenge.

For some, it may be driven by fear, or a past trauma related to the task. For others, maybe a reminder of a negative relationship. Some people might relate it to 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 while 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 to eat every day, as I found I could now appreciate



the fact that I have food (as not everyone has that 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 of 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, such as 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.

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. For example, food was a huge factor in my poor mental health, and not knowing how to shop or cook foods was impacting my life severely. Exploring new habits and routines around my diet allowed me to piece together other areas of my routine, which has greatly impacted my quality of life. By identifying your areas 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 - Lauren

Something that I have noticed through my personal mental health journey is that if I get up earlier than I normally do something simple (such as having a glass of cold water before starting the day), I find that I have an increase in my productivity and mood. This has even reduced my anxiety! The pandemic was very stressful but gave me the chance to be more mindful of the important wellness self-care routines that strengthen my mental health. I created a simple morning routine that included getting up and drinking water before starting my day or even looking at my phone. I take a deep breathing for a few minutes each morning. By starting my day being mindful and practicing something that benefits me, I have been able to add wellness habits throughout my entire day! Taking 5 minutes at the start of your day to ground myself can go a long way! Every time I have practiced these mindful skills, I end up having more time and motivation to make myself a nourishing breakfast, get dressed in an outfit I enjoy, and occasionally 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 course of the day. I am learning to fit my daily activities into these natural rhythms, which I find makes me more productive! Grounding myself through the day helps me enjoy my meals and enjoy other aspects of my day as well. Starting and ending my day with calm quality time for myself keeps me mindful and “In the Now”. Being aware of my circadian rhythms means helps me adjust my daily routines to better fit my own needs! 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.

What's 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 first week of October is **Get Organized Week** as well as **International Postcard Week** and **National Carry A Tune Week**.

Celebrate for a day!

- **Oct. 5th** – National “Do Something Nice Day”
- **Oct. 6th** - World Smile Day
- **Oct. 7th** - World Card Making Day
- **Oct. 7th** - You Matter To Me Day
- **Oct. 14th** - Universal Music Day
- **Oct 29th** - National Oatmeal 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.

References and Resources

- 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>
- 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/>
- This month's banner image was pulled from: <https://wall.alphacoders.com/big.php?i=1328228>
- A special thanks to Lauren Dick for allowing her articles that originally appeared in 2021 to be included again this month. Unless otherwise cited, illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution from pixabay.com

Words of Wellness 2023, October Issue. To subscribe, contact Peggy Swarbrick pswarbrick@cspnj.org