

# Mental Health and Sleep



Over the course of the last two years, we have all become more stressed. We know how important it is to create positive, sustainable habits to help us unwind. Creating positive sleep habits are one way to help your body recover from stress.

The topic is perhaps more important than ever, when research has highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had adverse effect on sleeping habits and dreams.<sup>1</sup>

## How can setting a bed time routine improve sleep?

Routines and habits can help promote healthy sleeping patterns. Following a schedule, getting up and going to bed at the same time, and aiming for at least seven hours of sleep, can help. Experts also recommend following a routine before heading for bed, which might include having a warm bath, reading a book, and avoiding phones and tablets for at least 30 minutes beforehand. Avoiding too much caffeine later on in the day, exercising earlier rather than later, and not eating too late can also help.<sup>2</sup>

## Positive sleep habits + your routine

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many routines and daily schedules were turned upside down. This, along with reduced exposure to natural light, the sudden clashing of home and work lives, and the worry surrounding the pandemic, may have affected our otherwise healthy sleeping habits. It's vital that we take this into account, and work on creating positive sleep habits that can lead to us being happier, healthier, and well-rested.

Next time you evaluate your sleep choices consider these tips to get a great night's sleep!

## The chemicals and hormones that regulate our sleep

Various chemicals and hormones are involved in the sleep-wake cycle – known as our circadian rhythm.<sup>3</sup> The shift between sleeping and waking up creates changes in thousands of neurons in the brain, causing the body to react in specific ways.

### Adenosine:

This chemical is said to play a critical role in the sleep cycle. It slows down the neurons' activity and builds up when we're awake, causing us to feel sleepy.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, caffeine suppresses adenosine, helping you to stay awake.<sup>4</sup>

### GABA, acetylcholine, orexin, and serotonin:

These are chemicals that activate and deactivate certain cells, by sending signals to the nervous system. These are more commonly referred to as neurotransmitters.<sup>5</sup>

### Melatonin:

This hormone plays a vital role in regulating your sleep cycle. As exposure to light decreases, melatonin is naturally produced, promoting sleep.<sup>4</sup>

### Cortisol:

Best known as a hormone secreted by the body in response to stress, cortisol also affects your sleep. Just like your sleep-wake cycle, cortisol follows a similar circadian rhythm.<sup>3</sup> Cortisol is released in small bursts throughout the day. The body slows down the production of cortisol around

midnight and generally peaks an hour before you wake up (around 09:00).<sup>3</sup>

### **Leptin, Ghrelin, Adrenaline, Norepinephrine:**

Finally, leptin and ghrelin are hormones that regulate our appetite and may impact our circadian rhythms, while adrenaline and

norepinephrine are considered hormones that play a key role in the sleep cycle.<sup>5,6</sup>

Hopefully, now that you know more about the science of sleep you can create positive sleep habits that will improve your daily life!



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3. Healthline. How Does Cortisol Affect Your Sleep? <https://www.healthline.com/health/cortisol-and-sleep#cortisol-and-stress>. Accessed December 7, 2021.
4. Johns Hopkins. Sleep/Wake Cycles. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/sleepwake-cycles>. Accessed December 7, 2021.
5. Forbes. These Neurotransmitters Are Probably Keeping You Up At Night. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2016/10/05/these-neurotransmitters-are-probably-keeping-you-up-at-night/?sh=5cacd9bc1228>. Accessed December 7, 2021.
6. The Sleep Foundation. Sleep and Overeating. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/physical-health/sleep-and-overeating>. Accessed December 7, 2021.

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