# Wellbeing toolkit

## Rest & sleep

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# Rest & sleep

**We spend a huge proportion of our lives sleeping. It's not time wasted - it's essential to helping our brain and body perform at their best.**

Both rest and sleep allow us to build vital recovery time into our day, helping our mind and body to recharge.

Without enough rest and recovery time in our daily routines, we're not able to perform at our best, professionally or personally.

In this factsheet, we'll be looking at two different ways our body recovers - rest and sleep and ways to make sure you create enough time for both.

## In this factsheet

- How to build in recovery time throughout the day
- What happens when we sleep
- Sleep hacks

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# Rest

**When we think about rest and recovery, we nearly always think about sleep, but managing your energy levels throughout the day is also important for being productive and feeling our best.**

Have you ever noticed that when you're struggling with a task the solution seems so obvious when you come back to it after a break?

There is plenty of scientific evidence to suggest that the brain needs downtime in order to process recent learning, solve problems and store memories.

By building in regular, proper amounts of rest into your day, you are giving your brain and body the processing and recovery time it needs.

Here are three top tips for building in recovery time throughout your day.

1

## Plan out your day

Look at what needs to get done, professionally and personally, and decide on your priorities for the day.

Sense check whether the list of things you've identified is feasible for one day so you're not putting too much pressure on yourself.

You'll need to take into account any other commitments such as childcare or caring responsibilities.

As well as planning what you need to do, think about the best time to do it.

Many of us are working at home at the moment, and it's easy for the boundaries between work and downtime to get blurred.

Lastly, make sure your plan for the day includes regular breaks to help boost concentrate and build in moments to rest and recover.

2

## Take micro breaks

Staying in the same place or focusing on the same task for hours at a time puts our bodies and brains under pressure making it difficult to perform at our best.

Whether you take just a few moments to stretch or a few minutes to make a cup of tea, regular breaks help boost concentration, minimise physical strain injuries and safeguard that vital recovery time.

If you're struggling to remember to take regular breaks, try setting a countdown timer on your phone or downloading an app that reminds you it's time for a break.

3

## Set boundaries

When we're in our usual workplace, walking out of the building and beginning our commute home helps signal to our brains that it's time to switch off from work and relax.

With many of us now working from home, it's easier for boundaries to blur and recovery time to get eaten away.

Help set expectations by sharing with your colleagues the times you're available and the additional responsibilities you may be juggling at the moment.

Reinforce those boundaries by sticking to the working hours you've set and resisting the temptation to answer a couple of emails late in the evening or pick up the phone if your manager calls outside those times.

Doing so will help you stay more productive and motivated in the long run.

# Sleep

**We've all heard the guidelines about getting 8 hours of sleep a night, but a significant percentage of UK adults don't manage that.**

With the added stress of worrying about loved ones or job security due to coronavirus, it can be even harder to get a good night's rest.

But sleep is absolutely essential to our wellbeing - both physical and mental.

Though we can boost our energy levels with breaks during the day, it's at night when our bodies really get the chance to repair and restore.

## What happens when we sleep?

There are two types of sleep: non-REM and REM. Each type includes different stages, forming the sleep cycle.

The first stages you experience when sleeping are 'Non-REM'. During this type of sleep, there is no movement and the muscles are relaxed. The body uses this time to repair and rejuvenate itself.

REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is the final stage of the sleep cycle and is when the brain actively re-organises itself.

During this stage, the body and muscles are paralysed, but the brain is awake and your eyes continue to move quickly behind your eyelids.

It's impossible to regulate the time spent within each stage, but giving yourself enough time to sleep will allow the body to find its rhythm and get the right amount of each stage.

## The different stages of sleep

**Stage 1:** When you're starting to drift off, you may hear things around you and have a sense of awareness, but your heart rate slows down as your body prepares to sleep.

**Stage 2:** Described as 'lighter sleep', you have now fallen asleep but could easily be woken or disturbed. The brain takes this time to repair and process memories.

**Stage 3:** The final stage of Non-REM is when you fall into a deeper sleep where muscles are relaxed and recovery can take place.

**Stage 4:** This stage is when your heart rate increases and you experience REM sleep. The most active point of dreaming, this stage is important for the brain as sorts through memories and emotions.

# Sleep hacks

**Knowing that sleep is so important but being aware you're not getting enough can create even more stress, making it harder to fall asleep and creating a vicious cycle.**

Here are our top tips for creating the right environment and cultivating the right habits to get the rest you need.

## During the day

The foundations for a good night's sleep are laid during the day.

Staying active and getting enough exercise is a great way to make sure you feel tired at the end of the day and ready to head to bed.

It's also important to watch your caffeine intake. Caffeine's half-life is about 5 hours. That means if you had a cup of coffee at 4pm, half of the caffeine would still be in your system at 9pm.

Try to limit caffeine intake to the morning and early afternoon to avoid it disturbing your sleep.

If you struggle to fall asleep because of worrying, try and set aside time to acknowledge and reflect on those worries before the end of the day to avoid them going round your head as you're trying to go to sleep.

## During the evening

After the working day, it's essential to find ways to switch off and relax.

What this looks like will be different for everyone, but having enough time to process the day, put aside the stresses and do something you enjoy will help you unwind ready for bed.

Whilst drinking in moderation is ok, keep in mind that alcohol significantly effects sleep quality, keeping us in the lighter stages of sleep rather than the much-needed deep sleep phase.

If you're having an alcoholic drink, early evening is better to minimise the impact on sleep quality.

## Getting ready for bed

We're creatures of habit: one of the best ways to get more sleep is to create a routine around a fixed bedtime and wake-up time.

As it gets nearer to bedtime, start to fade down artificial lighting, moving from a bright overhead light to a softer lamp.

Avoid watching TV or using other screens, including your phone, for at least an hour before bedtime: the blue light these devices emit can tell our brains it's time to wake up, not sleep.

## Create the right environment

Bedrooms should be a relaxing, calming place to sleep. Creating the right sleep environment can help you get the quality shut-eye you need.

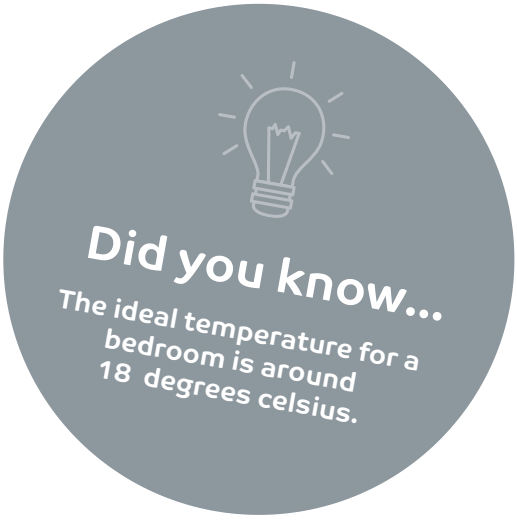
Firstly, try to minimise any potential distractions, such as noise or light.

Using ear plugs or a white noise app can help reduce the chances of you woken up by noise.

If your bedroom gets lots of natural light, consider investing in blackout curtains or an eye mask to minimise disruption.

The other thing to consider is temperature. The body regulates its core temperature throughout the different sleep stages.

Being at a cool, comfortable temperature means our bodies don't have to work as hard to maintain that temperature and can focus instead on resting and repairing.



# Wellbeing toolkit

**This factsheet is part of our Wellbeing Toolkit aimed at helping teams stay well during the coronavirus outbreak.**

Each week, a new pair of factsheets covering mental and physical wellbeing is released.

Take a look at westfieldhealth.com/covid-19 for access to all resources.

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