

**6.00–8.00 a.m. Up and at it**

For most people it's time to rise and shine with the sun – but some body clocks disagree! From puberty until around 20, the body clock shifts forward, so most adolescents aren't ready to sleep until late at night, despite needing more sleep than adults. That's why groggy-eyed teenagers emerge from the bedroom at lunchtime at weekends. On school days, getting up for school at 7.00 feels like getting up at 4.00 for an older person, and students and teachers suffer as a result. Studies show that when schools start lessons at 10.00, 11.00, or even 12.00, students perform better and achieve higher grades.

**8.00–10.00 a.m. Getting going**

Many of us find it difficult to get going in the morning, so is vigorous exercise a good kick-start? It can be, but it's not the ideal time for it. Our blood thickens as our blood pressure drops during sleep, and a sudden increase of activity can send it soaring, making this the most likely time to suffer a stroke or heart attack. Gently moving into the day is what the doctor orders.

**10.00–12.00 p.m. Good thinking!**

Teenagers apart, mental performance is at its peak during this time due to a rise in cortisol, a stress hormone which can be a useful stimulant in the morning, making us feel awake and alert. Levels of cortisol fall during the afternoon, and drop off completely in the evening.

**12.00–4.00 p.m. Time to pause**

The brain slows a little and is better suited to more reflective work as the day progresses, but it's still performing well, ... until after lunch! As the body digests food it produces insulin, which triggers the release of serotonin and melatonin. These bring feelings of pleasure, and sleepiness, and a nap is a good idea. It's certainly not a good time to drive – there are more motorway crashes at this time of day.

**4.00–6.00 p.m. Go for it!**

This is the time to hit the gym! The sleepiness has gone, the body is nicely warmed up by this time, and lung function is at its peak, providing the opportunity for our best physical performance. A study of Olympic swimmers found that they swam three seconds faster during this time than in the morning, and most athletics records are broken in the early evening.

**6.00–8.00 p.m. Light refreshment**

Our body temperature is still high, so things are running smoothly and, if you fancy a drink, alcohol won't cloud your mind as much now. Our minds also turn to food, but as evening advances, your liver needs a rest from breaking down fatty foods. It means we'll put on more weight if we eat too much food after 7.00, and run a higher risk of developing diabetes. Big meals are best taken at lunchtime.

**8.00–10.00 p.m. Sleepytime**

We feel sleepy as bedtime approaches, but it's not only teenagers who may not feel tired – older people can become night owls, too. To bring sleepiness on earlier, the trick is to avoid too much light later in the day, as the more light you get then, the longer your body will stay awake. Wearing sunglasses in the late afternoon and evening make getting to sleep easier for old people.

**10.00 p.m.–12.00 a.m. Dropping off**

It's definitely time for sleep, but allergy sufferers and anyone with a cold will struggle. Our immune system is particularly reactive at this time, knowing that as we begin to rest and withdraw from the outside world, it's a good time to fight those internal enemies!

**12.00–2.00 a.m. Sleep tight!**

Not everyone stays fast asleep, unfortunately. As their eyesight becomes weaker, old people take in less light, and suffer from interrupted sleep as their body clocks function less reliably. They should try and get as much light as possible earlier in the day, as this will help with both insomnia and dementia.

**2.00–6.00 a.m. Out of it and into it**

As body temperature and blood pressure drop, our energy goes into lighter biological activity, such as skin repair. 4.00 a.m. is the absolute low point, and another bad time to drive – it's about as dangerous at this time as when we are over the alcohol limit. A new day is about to dawn, and so the cycle begins again – or for the first time for some. Because the body is so relaxed, the most common time for babies to be born naturally is between 3.00 and 5.00 a.m.!

