

Sleep, Relax and Reset

The key things to take away with you



Meet Our Experts: [Learn about – sleep](#)

Sleep. Rest. Relax. Repeat!

Thanks for coming along to our Meet Our Experts event all about sleep and the importance of getting back into a good routine when summer turns to autumn. This booklet is your handy takeaway guide to many of the things you'll have heard our experts talk about.

From getting back into a training routine and why having a good bedtime plan is so vital, to useful tips for getting the kids back to school after their long summer break and a guide to relaxing (for beginners!) there's something to help everyone.



The importance of a good bedtime routine

What do you think about when you think about sleep? Chances are it's the amount of sleep you're getting, rather than the actual quality of sleep itself. Good quality of sleep is key – and it's about having the right balance of deep, slow-wave sleep as well as shallow, rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which is where dreaming occurs.



Good quality sleep allows your body to recover and your mind to make sense of everything you've done (and learnt) that day. How do you go about ensuring good quality sleep?

Caffeine

Caffeine's effects on the body take 3-6 hours to wear off, depending on the level of caffeine in the drink. So, stay away from this stimulant in the afternoon and evening to avoid negatively affecting sleep.

What caffeine does: blocks the brain's adenosine receptors. What are those? Adenosine is involved in making us feel sleepy, so blocking it inhibits the body's homeostatic desire to sleep after a long period of wakefulness. How much caffeine is too much to consume in general? That's hard to say, because caffeine affects everyone differently.

Lighting

In terms of your bedroom, low lighting or darker lighting is best as it helps maintain the 'light-dark' cycle. Humans go to sleep when it is dark, therefore bright lights are not ideal. Rather than just switching lights off when it's time for bed, lower them in the lead up to bedtime to let your body know it's time to climb the stairs to Bedfordshire...

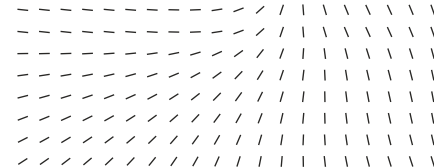
Exercise

Regular exercise is likely to improve sleep quality. And, actually, improving sleep quality also improves your likelihood of sticking to exercise too! What to avoid: high-intensity exercise in the hours leading up to bed, as this can activate the sympathetic nervous system.

In addition to managing caffeine and exercise, building a good bedtime routine is absolutely key to optimising your sleep health. What you do in the hour leading up to bed is just as important as actually getting sleep itself.

Temperature

It's thought that a cool room helps to reduce the body temperature prior to sleep, which helps initiate the sleep process. So, make sure your room is kept fairly cool – around 19°C.



Getting back into a training routine



Getting back into a training routine can be challenging, no matter what time of year it may be. So, here are some tips for goal setting, adding a training plan and building an effective routine to set yourself up for success.

Start by setting your goals

Always start by setting goals that are SMART:

- ◆ Specific
- ◆ Measurable
- ◆ Attainable
- ◆ Realistic
- ◆ Timely

Laying the groundwork will help you establish your priorities and motivate you to get started. Then, once you have your SMART goals, a plan will help maximise your workout time, leaving you less time wondering what to do and how to do it.

Add a training plan

A training plan will help you achieve a well-rounded workout, which can help prevent injury and maximise results. Having a plan also allows you to rebuild your fitness steadily and safely. Plus, planning ahead can help you cue workouts and avoid procrastination!

Define your training plan

Next, identify the number of times a week you can commit to physical activity, including rest times, and build in some flexibility. Even the best-laid plans will have in-the-moment changes sometimes. Set realistic targets to reach your goals and adjust according to your progress.

Other things to think about

- ♦ Break down the activities you want to complete
- ♦ Avoid overloading your schedule and feeling like you're unable to accomplish all you've said you are going to do
- ♦ Get some support from our experienced Personal Trainers adding an expert to your training routine will give you guidance, motivation and accountability
- ♦ Keep it balanced – even if you're aiming to build cardiovascular endurance for a long run, you should include exercises for flexibility and strength to avoid injury
- ♦ Important! Having a plan isn't about being restrictive. Putting time aside to think about your workouts can help you tick off the basics, adapt when necessary and make time to try new things.



Back to school. Top tips!

We all know that the last year has been challenging for our little ones. Their usual routines have been displaced with home school and online lectures. So, here are a few tips to help get big ones and little ones back to a better school routine.



Get back into a routine

Throughout this difficult period our routines have had to be more fluid than normal, but it's now more important than ever to get back into a routine. This means getting up at the same time every day, eating regular meals and following structured bedtimes. Encouraging your children back into the term-time schedule a week before school starts will do a lot to ease the transition.

Communicate!

Children can find periods of transition stressful, so talk through the process with them. Discuss what to expect and listen to their concerns – but don't rush to try and fix everything at once. Allow them to vent their worries before reassuring them they can cope. A degree of stress or distress regarding a change of routine is to be expected and not avoided. Instead, work on finding coping strategies like breathing exercises or physical activities they might enjoy (swimming or bike rides, for example).

Healthy eating

Plan and test healthy breakfast recipes to start your child's day off right. If cooking isn't an option, choose a low sugar cereal and add a banana, strawberries or other fresh fruit with a little honey.

Walk through the practicalities

If it's a new school, do a practice run of the walk there as well as the drop off routine if possible. Helping children visualise what's going to happen can make anxieties seem more manageable.

It's the thought that counts

Encourage your child to notice that thoughts (often in the form of an inner voice in their mind) accompany any mood they're experiencing. Situations don't make people anxious or stressed: it's the way we think about situations that creates the mood. If you can help your child to access the thoughts 'fuelling' the mood, you can then support them to problem-solve when they're feeling low.

Celebrate the milestone

Creating rituals can help cue children for what's ahead and form positive associations. Over time, these will become treasured moments. Why not celebrate the first term with a spooky Halloween themed bake off?



A beginner's guide to relaxing

Making an effort to relax might sound counterintuitive, but it's vital to your emotional and physical wellbeing. So, here are a few techniques to help you unwind.



Roll with it

Stress triggers the same physical reaction as sensing danger. Your heart rate increases, adrenaline is released, and the body tenses up. Muscles contract to prepare for action and to form a solid layer of protection for your vital organs. When your body prepares for fight or flight, you can end up hunched and tense without realising it.

To counteract this, consciously relax your shoulders and upper body. Pull your core muscles in towards your spine, sit up straight, and roll your shoulders deeply. If that's not comfortable, try pulling your shoulders tightly up to your ears for a couple of seconds and then suddenly releasing them. Gently and slowly lean your head from side to side and breathe regularly while doing so.

Releasing tension in your body will help to signal to your brain that you're not about to do battle, and you should begin to feel calmer as a result! Repeat as necessary.

Breathe in, breathe out

In preparation for fighting or fleeing, when you're stressed your breathing may become shallow and even irregular. This can in turn make you feel more anxious, so nip it in the bud. Stop what you're doing and take some deep, slow breaths. Breathe in for five beats, and out for five.

Allow your chest to expand and your belly to rise as your lungs fill with air. At the end of the exhale, try making a 'shh' sound and squeezing the last of the air out. Repeat this four or five times, then check how you feel.

If you can, try to remove yourself from whatever stressful situation you might have found yourself in while you do this – and enhance your ability to 'zone out' even further by listening to a relaxing song.

Carry some calm with you

We don't always have the time to practice a full meditation or mindfulness exercise, but smell is a powerful tool for evoking memories and feelings. So, did you know that you can train your body to associate a particular scent with the feeling of being relaxed? Here's how it works.

The next time you're in the bath, reading a book, unwinding before bed, or having a massage, try using something scented. Then, when you need to re-centre and calm yourself, using a hand cream or perfumed oil with the same scent can help take you back to when you were calm.

Building a healthier nation, starting with you

We're the UK's largest healthcare charity. For the last 60 years, our team of experts have been working together to make the UK fitter, healthier, happier and stronger, all for the public benefit. As a trading charity with no shareholders, we invest all our income back into our family of 37 hospitals, 114 fitness and wellbeing centres, healthcare clinics and over 200 on-site workplace wellbeing services, as well as developing flagship charitable activities supporting our communities – all to realise our vision to build a healthier nation.

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1.25 million

people reached by our services*

1st

structured COVID-19 rehabilitation programme launched

114

fitness and wellbeing centres

37

hospitals nationwide

*2020 annual report.



One of the ways we're building a healthier nation