

Bodies have peak time to accomplish all sorts of tasks

By Sue Shellenbarger, Wall Street Journal

Could you pack more into each day if you did everything at the optimal time?

A growing body of research suggests that paying attention to the body clock, and its effects on energy and alertness, can help pinpoint the different times of day when most of us perform our best at specific tasks, from resolving conflicts to thinking creatively.

Many people are squeezing so much into their days that old-fashioned time management doesn't work, productivity researchers say.

Most people organize their time around everything but the body's natural rhythms. Workday demands, commuting, social events and kids' schedules frequently dominate—inevitably clashing with the body's circadian rhythms of waking and sleeping.

As difficult as it may be to align schedules with the body clock, it may be worth it to try, because of significant potential health benefits. Disruption of circadian rhythms has been linked to such problems as diabetes, depression, dementia and obesity, says Steve Kay, a professor of molecular and computational biology at the University of Southern California. When the body's master clock can synchronize functioning of all its metabolic, cardiovascular and behavioral rhythms in response to light and other natural stimuli, it "gives us an edge in daily life," Kay says.

When it comes to doing cognitive work, for example, most adults perform best in the late morning, says Dr. Kay. As body

temperature starts to rise just before awakening in the morning and continues to increase through midday, working memory, alertness and concentration gradually improve. Taking a warm morning shower can jump-start the process.

The ability to focus and concentrate typically starts to slide soon thereafter. Most people are more easily distracted from noon to 4pm, according to recent research led by Robert Matchock, an associate professor of psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

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