



Dear Colleague

Welcome to your weekly edition of the LLR Health and Wellbeing communication, designed to promote the offers and resources available to help support your health and wellbeing.

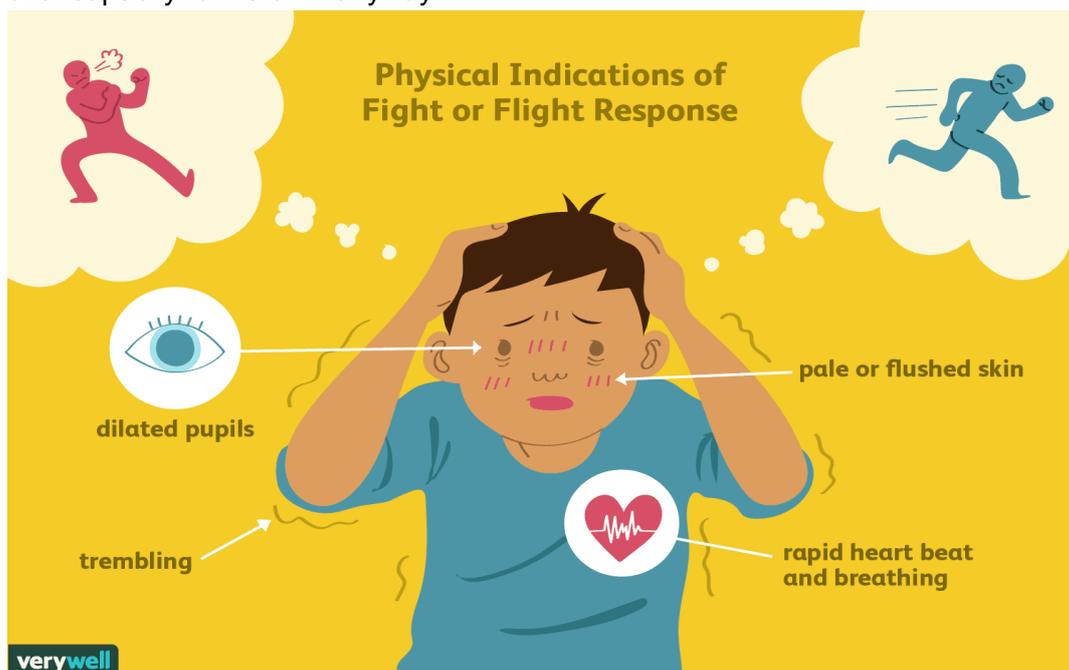
April is Stress Awareness Month. We ask you to continue to check in on yourself, your colleagues, friends and family – are you / they doing ok?

LLR System Health and Wellbeing support available

It's really important to recognise when you are feeling stressed and to learn what coping strategies work for you. How we deal with stress is individual, we all react in different ways. Small amounts of stress can be a positive driver for some, but too much stress or prolonged periods of stress, where your body is constantly in and out of 'fight or flight' mode, can have an extremely negative impact on your overall mental health and wellbeing. If not addressed, this can lead to anxiety, depression and ultimately, burn out.

What do we mean by Flight or Flight?

The fight-or-flight response (also called hyperarousal or the acute stress response) is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival. During the COVID-19 pandemic many have experienced prolonged periods of stress where general threat levels have been high over a long period of time due to uncertainty, change and stressors. This is on top of normal day-day life, which often fills our emotional capacity to the brim anyway!



When emotional capacity is nearing full, life can seem more difficult and we can have big reactions to seemingly small things, feel overwhelmed, irritable, and even experience burn out. Often, this can happen when we step back after a prolonged period of stress, when things are beginning to calm down and get back to 'normal', and can be due to low resilience levels.

Instead of telling yourself 'I shouldn't feel this way', recognise that how you are feeling may be the result of dealing with long-term stress and the impact that has had on your body and mind. Stress can often creep up on us, it's about understanding how to proactively manage it in a healthy way.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Have you experienced any of the symptoms included below? If so, this could be a sign of stress (this is not an exhaustive list but does include many of the common signs of stress).

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness / never feel rested • A tight chest • Occasional rapid heart beat • Change in bowel habits • Indigestion • Headaches • Appetite and Weight Change • Joint and back pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Tearfulness • Feeling low • Mood changes • Indecision • Loss of motivation • Increased sensitivity • Low self-esteem • Worrying more than usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased smoking and drinking • Withdrawal or aggression • Lateness • Recklessness • Difficulty concentrating / brain fog • Easily agitated • Lack of interest / motivation

What Can I do to better manage stress?

To help proactively manage stress we have included lots of information, hints and tips below. These are designed to help you and your colleagues navigate through stressful times and manage stress in a healthier ongoing basis.

- Look after and prioritise the basics – A well balanced healthy diet, keep hydrated, exercise, sleep, and connection with others
- Learn to recognise the signs when you are feeling overwhelmed
- Don't be afraid to ask for help – seek support if you feel you need to
- Communicate – talk things through with colleagues, friends and family
- Prioritise breaks and recovery time (even just a little will help)
- Step back, reflect and process your thoughts and feelings
- Be kind to yourself and others, and don't beat yourself up if you're not feeling great
- Take care of your personal and professional relationships
- Try not to worry about the things you can't control.

'Don't worry about what you can't control. Our focus and energy needs to be on the things we CAN control, today'

Let's Focus on Sleep

Sleep plays a huge part in our overall mental health and wellbeing, if you're not getting enough, or if you're not getting enough of the right kind of sleep (i.e. Deep and REM sleep), it can have a knock on affect to all aspects of your life – sleep is the foundation to good mental health and wellbeing. Sleep problems and stress combines can soon become a vicious cycle!

Why is Sleep So Important?

Put simply, we all have 24-hour cycles that are part of our body's internal clock called Circadian rhythms, running in the background to carry out essential functions and processes at various points during a 24-hour period. One of the most important and well-known circadian rhythms is the sleep-wake cycle.

A whole number of things can disrupt our sleep-wake cycle, including shift work (which we'll come onto), when our sleep is thrown off, the body's systems can't function optimally. Without the proper signaling from our body's internal clock, we can struggle to fall asleep, wake up during the night, or experience that 'never rested' feeling each morning.

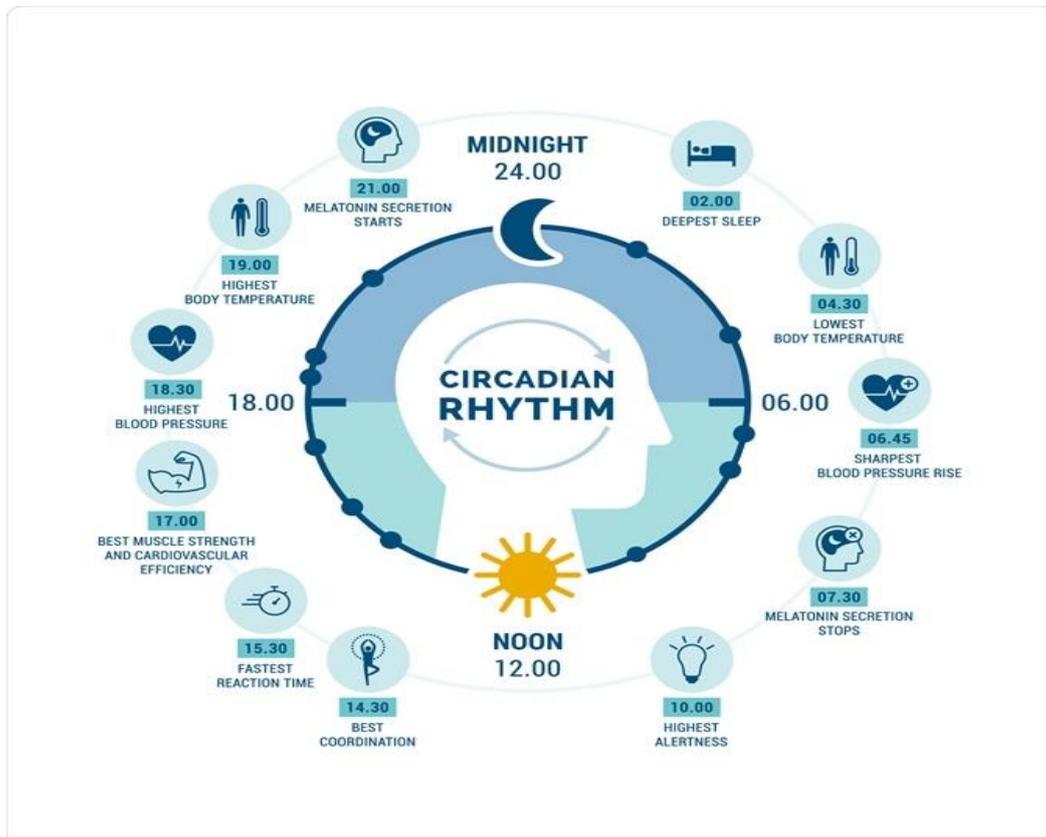
How Can We Help Support a Healthy Sleep-wake Cycle?

- **Seek out the sun** - exposure to natural light, especially early in the day, helps reinforce the strongest circadian cue
- **Follow a consistent sleep schedule** - varying your bedtime or morning wake-up time can hinder your body's ability to adjust to a stable circadian rhythm
- **Daily exercise** – regular activity during the day can support your internal clock and help make it easier to fall asleep at night
- **Avoid caffeine** - stimulants such as caffeine can keep you awake and throw off the natural balance between sleep and wakefulness. Everyone is different, but if you're having trouble sleeping, you should probably try to avoid caffeine after noon
- **Limit light before bed** – artificial light exposure at night can interfere with circadian rhythm. A hormone called melatonin is released as it gets dark which helps us to feel drowsy. Experts advise dimming the lights and putting down electronic devices in the lead-up to bedtime and even keeping electronics out of the bedroom completely or putting them onto aeroplane mode
- **Avoid alcohol and food close to bedtime** – leave at least 2-3 hours after drinking and eating before going to bed
- **Keep naps short and early in the afternoon** – keep any day time naps short, long naps can push back your bedtime and throw your sleep schedule off
- **Follow a consistent bedtime routine** – take a warm bath or shower, read a book, listen to a meditation app, practice a relaxing breathing cycle, practice a yoga flow, book end your day in a gratitude journal, whatever works for you, consistency is key.

What If I Am a Shift Worker?

Working shifts, especially night shifts, involves successfully managing your sleep during the day, to keep your sleep 'debt' to a minimum and your fatigue during the night. Day time sleep can be lighter, shorter, and of poorer quality than sleep at night due to light, noise and temperature. As well as following the advice included above, it's worth taking the steps below to help support a healthy sleep-wake cycle:

- **Don't delay going to bed** – If you're stimulated from work it can sometimes be hard to wind down, but try not to delay going to bed, the longer you do, the more awake you are likely to become
- **Set aside enough time to sleep** – Try to set aside 7-9 hours to dedicate to sleep after a night shift, the aim is to get enough good quality sleep over the course of the week
- **Eat and drink** – have something light to eat and drink before going to bed, hunger or thirst could wake you up, but something too heavy on your stomach could keep you awake
- **Avoid stimulants such as smoking before going to bed** – nicotine can cause you to experience disturbed sleep, as can alcohol
- **Steer clear of stimulating activities** – in this case, exercise is probably not a good idea in the morning, instead try to exercise when you wake and before your next night shift. Even watching stimulating TV right before bed, can disrupt sleep
- **Notify friends and family** – let people know you'll be in bed during the day to prevent disturbances unless absolutely necessary
- **Practice good sleep hygiene** – make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature. Earplugs and black out blinds can be good options for shift workers.



The Stress Management Society

The Stress Management Society has a wealth of resources and useful information on all things stress, including a test to measure your current stress levels, which you can access via their website here: [The Stress Management Society - From Distress to De-Stress](#)

Local and National Support

Please don't forget there is a wealth of local and national support offers available for you to access, as well as wellbeing apps which you can download for FREE, details of which can be found in previous communications via the LLR Academy website here:

[Previous Newsletters - LLR Academy](#)

LLR Emotional Resilience Workshops – Further Dates Announced!

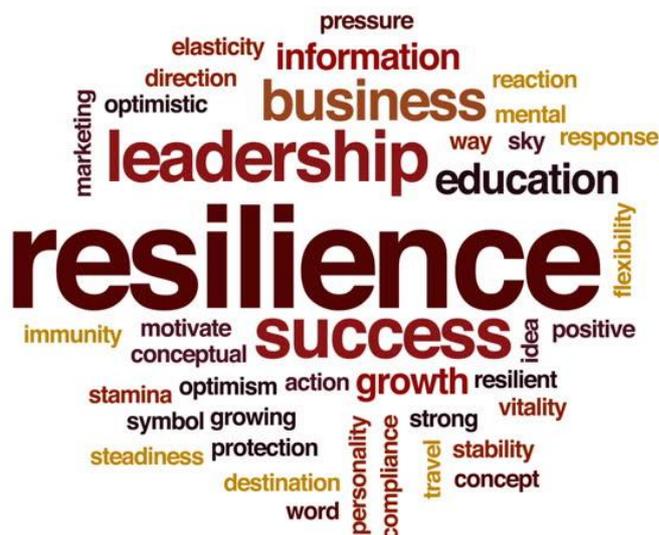
This one-hour interactive virtual workshop will provide an opportunity to work through some practical tools and techniques to boost your resilience, and provide a platform to share your own tips too! The workshop is available to all health and social care colleagues, irrespective of whether you are shielding, working from home or at work.

Two new dates have been added to the schedule:

Thursday May 6th 10:00-11:00

Tuesday June 7th 12:00-13:00

The workshops are proving to be very popular, don't miss out, book your place now via the link here: <https://www.llracademy.org/emotional-resilience-workshop/>



Please get in touch with comments or feedback via email to the LLR System Health and Wellbeing Team at: LLRAcademy@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Thank you