

How to rewire your brain to feel good on Mondays

March 27 2023, by Cristina R. Reschke and Jolanta Burke



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

If you hate Mondays, you're most certainly in good company. After a couple of days off, many of us have difficulty settling back into our routines and work duties. You may even have dread and anxiety that seeps into the weekend in the form of "Sunday scaries".

You can't always change your schedule or obligations to make Mondays more appealing, but you may be able to "reprogram" your brain to think about the week differently.

Our brains love predictability and routine. Research has shown that lack of routine is associated with [decline in well-being and psychological distress](#). Even though the weekend heralds a leisurely and pleasant time, our brain works hard to adjust to this sudden change to a routine.

The good news is that the brain does not need to make too much effort when adjusting to the weekend's freedom and lack of routine. However, it's a different story when coming back to the less pleasant activities, such as a to-do list on Monday morning.

One way to adjust to post-weekend change is introducing routines that last the whole week and have the power to make our lives [more meaningful](#). These may include [watching your favorite TV program](#), [gardening](#) or going [to the gym](#). It is helpful to do these things at the same time every day.

Routines improve our [sense of coherence](#), a process that allows us to make sense of the jigsaw of life events. When we have an established routine, be it the routine of working five days and taking two days off or engaging in a set of actions every day, our lives become [more meaningful](#).

Another important routine to establish is your sleep routine. [Research shows](#) that keeping consistent sleep time may be as important for enjoying Mondays as how long your sleep lasts or its quality.

Changes in sleep patterns during weekends trigger [social jetlag](#). For instance, sleeping in later than usual and for longer on free days may trigger a discrepancy between your [body clock](#) and socially-imposed

responsibilities. This is linked to higher stress levels on Monday morning.

Try to keep a set time for going to bed and waking up, avoid naps. You might also want to create a 30 minute "wind-down" routine before sleep, by turning off or putting away your digital devices and practicing relaxation techniques.

Hacking your hormones

Hormones can also play a role in how we feel about Mondays. For instance, cortisol is a very important multifunction hormone. It helps our bodies to control our metabolism, regulate our [sleep-wake cycle](#) and our response to stress, among other things. It is usually released about an hour before we wake up (it helps us feel awake) and then its levels lower until the next morning, unless we're under stress.

Under acute stress, our bodies release not only cortisol, but also adrenaline in preparation for fight or flight. This is when the heart beats fast, we get sweaty palms and may react impulsively. This is our amygdala (a small almond-shaped area in the base of our brains) hijacking our brains. It creates a super fast emotional response to stress even before our brains can process and think whether it was needed.

But as soon as we can think—activating the brain's prefrontal cortex, the area for our reason and executive thinking—this response will be mitigated, if there is no real threat. It is a constant battle between our emotions and reason. This might wake us up in the middle of the night when we're too stressed or anxious.

It shouldn't be surprising then that [cortisol levels](#), measured in saliva samples of full-time working individuals, tend to be higher on Mondays and Tuesdays, with the lowest levels reported on [Sundays](#).

As a stress hormone, cortisol fluctuates daily, but not consistently. On weekdays, as soon as we wake up, [cortisol levels soar](#) and variations tend to be higher than on [weekends](#).

To combat this, we need to trick the amygdala by training the brain to only recognize actual threats. In other words, we need to activate our prefrontal cortex as fast as possible.

One of the best ways to achieve this and lower overall [stress](#) is through relaxation activities, especially on Mondays. One possibility is mindfulness, which is associated with a [reduction in cortisol](#). [Spending time in nature](#) is another method—going outside first thing on Monday or even during your lunch hour can make a significant difference to how you perceive the beginning of the week.

Give yourself time before checking your phone, social media and the news. It's good to wait for [cortisol](#) peak to decrease naturally, which happens approximately one hour after waking up, before you expose yourself to external stressors.

By following these simple tips, you can train your [brain](#) to believe that the weekdays can be (nearly) as good as the weekend.

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