

A woman with long, curly brown hair is posing in front of a large, stylized clock face. She is wearing a bright blue cardigan over a light pink sports bra and yellow leggings. Her right arm is raised, and her left leg is extended to the side. The clock face has large black numbers on a white background.

TRY THAT NEW CROSSFIT WORKOUT

Between 5 and 6 p.m.

Body temperature is peaking—which means you're more nimble and less likely to get injured—so it's a good moment to experiment with a novel activity. "Hand-eye coordination is sharpest, lung functioning is high, muscle fibers are warm, and your mood is brighter," says circadian rhythm expert Michael Smolensky. Matthew Edlund, M.D., author of *The Power of Rest*, agrees: "This is the time of day when Olympic records tend to be set."



TIME IT RIGHT!

WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING TO RUN FASTER, SLEEP BETTER, OR COME UP WITH THE NEXT MILLION-DOLLAR IDEA, WATCHING THE CLOCK JUST MIGHT GET YOU THERE.

by Esther Crain ● photography by Sarah Kehoe

You're sitting in a meeting at 2 p.m. and can't seem to keep your eyes open. It's not boredom—well, maybe just a little—but it's mostly that your body is going on a regularly scheduled break. If that same meeting had been planned for 10:30 a.m., you could just as easily have been energized and on the ball, possibly churning out tons of great ideas.

The fact is, all day and all night long the master internal timer that is your circadian clock is ticking away, keeping virtually every bodily function on track. That includes anything from your ability

to retain what your boss just said to your performance in a 5K. “Your memory, energy level, metabolism, and even your chances of getting sick change throughout the day, often substantially,” explains Michael Smolensky, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Texas and coauthor of *The Body Clock Guide to Better Health*.

The takeaway: Study up on these shifts and align them with your daily agenda and you may feel happier, healthier, and more productive. Just open your planner and get ready to jot down a reminder about the best time to... →

CATCH SOME RAYS

☉ BEFORE 10 A.M.

A 15-minute blast of UV light cues your brain to stop releasing the sleep hormone melatonin, chasing away that draggy just-woke-up feeling and improving your mood. Do apply sunscreen, though, says Albert M. Lefkowitz, M.D., associate clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

TACKLE A TRICKY WORK PROJECT

☉ BETWEEN 10 AND 11 A.M.

Your core temperature rises at this time, and then again from the hours of 5 to 7 p.m., prompting your brain to be at its most agile, explains Edlund, director of the Center for Circadian Medicine in Sarasota, FL. When your muscles, nerves, and joints warm up, you feel sharper and more energetic.

HAVE A MEDICAL PROCEDURE

☉ BEFORE NOON

While *your* fatigue level might not matter much (especially if you're being sedated), you do want your doctor to be at the top of her game. "Studies show that surgeons make fewer mistakes in the morning, possibly because they're more alert," says Mark Di Vincenzo, author of *Buy Shoes on Wednesday and Tweet at 4:00*. For example, research from the Cleveland Clinic found that when physicians did colonoscopies in the a.m., they were more likely to catch something suspicious.

EAT BREAKFAST

Within 90 minutes of waking up

Besides cranking your energy levels and revving your metabolism after the night's fast, consuming about 300 calories first thing in the morning keeps you from getting ravenous and overeating later in the day, explains Joy Bauer, R.D., nutrition and health expert for the *Today* show. Shoot for a mix of complex carbs and lean protein, like egg whites and veggies in a whole-grain tortilla.

GO FOR A STROLL

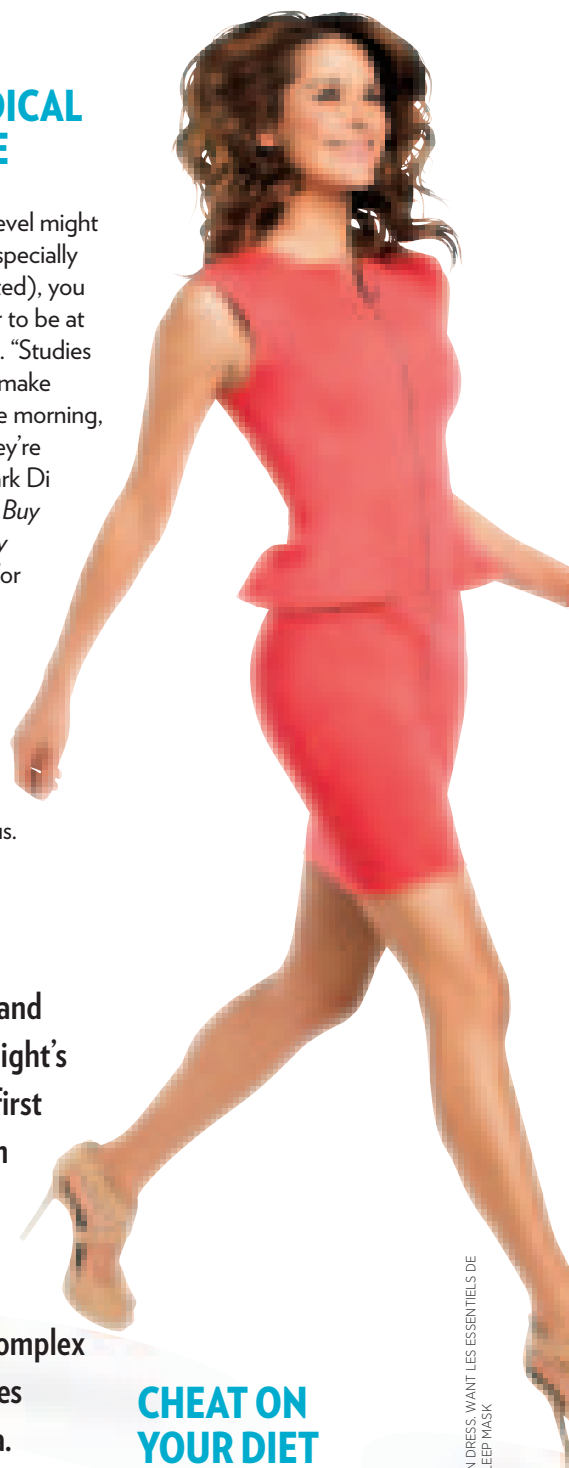
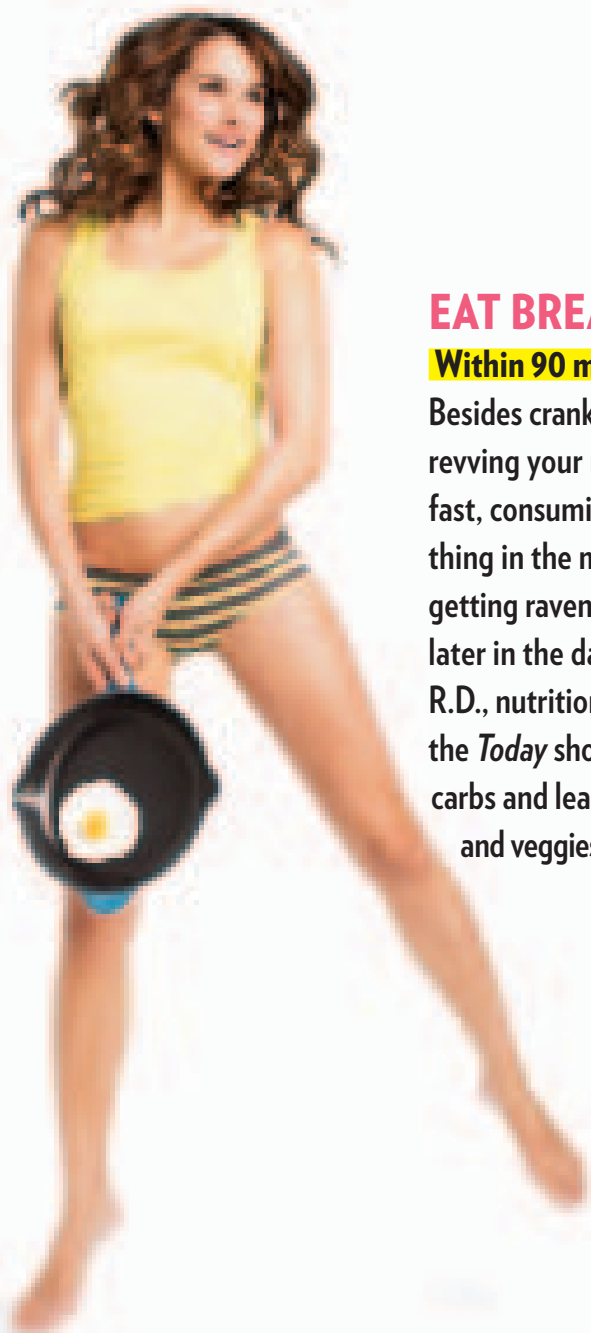
☉ BETWEEN 12 AND 2 P.M.

Even if you didn't eat a heavy lunch, you may feel sleepy because body temperature naturally dips at this time—signaling that it's time to rest, says Robert L. Matchock, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Penn State University. Cut through the fog with a 20-minute power walk.

CHEAT ON YOUR DIET

☉ BETWEEN 11 A.M. AND 2 P.M.

When caving to your craving for a bag of chips is a given, this is the safest window. "If you go off your diet later in the day, there's less time to burn the excess calories and get back on track before bedtime," says Holly L. Phillips, M.D., a women's health specialist in New York City and a *CBS This Morning* medical contributor.



SPLENDID TANK: STEVE MADDEN PANTIES: ERIN BY ERIN FETHERSTON DRESS: WANT LES ESSENTIELS DE LA VIE BAG: CHARLES DAVID HEELS: EBERJEY BRALETTE: YUMI KIM SLEEP MASK

THE BEST TIME OF THE MONTH TO...

INTERVIEW FOR A JOB

Right before ovulation
With an influx of energy-boosting testosterone and estrogen, you're extra confident, says Rebecca Booth, M.D., an ob-gyn in Louisville, KY, and author of *The Venus Week*.

GET A BIKINI WAX

The week after your period ends

Your pain threshold is at its highest, says Booth, thanks to rising levels of the feel-good hormone dopamine and the natural "opiates" called endorphins.

SEE YOUR OB-GYN

Between days 7 and 14 of your menstrual cycle
"Breast tissue is less lumpy, making it easier for your doctor to do a clinical breast check," says Alyssa Dweck, M.D., an ob-gyn in Mount Kisco, NY, and coauthor of *V Is for Vagina*.

HAVE SEX

Just prior to ovulation (usually days 12, 13, and 14 of your cycle)
"Estrogen is at its max, so you feel attractive," says Booth, "while an elevated testosterone level puts you in a lustful mood." But fertility is high, so watch out if you don't want a baby!

SIP SOME WINE

BETWEEN 4 AND 8 P.M.

Meet up with friends on the early side so that any alcohol will be metabolized before you hit the sheets—a process that could take several hours, especially if you have more than one glass. Otherwise, says Bauer, you're likely to toss and turn and never experience deep, restorative slumber.

EAT DINNER

BEFORE 8 P.M.

Late-night diners are at greater risk of packing on the pounds, according to a study from Northwestern University. Our bodies are designed to sleep when the sun goes down, so eating long afterward may cause changes in metabolism and insulin production that result in weight gain. After-dark digestion can also interfere with sleep, adds New York City-based nutritionist Stephanie Middleberg, R.D.

APPLY ANTI-PERSPIRANT

AT BEDTIME

The chemicals that keep you from sweating are much better absorbed when your skin is dry, says Lisa J. Pieretti, executive director of the

International Hyperhidrosis Society. "Most people put it on when their skin is still damp after a morning shower, but if you use it at night, it'll plug your sweat ducts and help you stay fresh for 24 hours."

ESTHER CRAIN is a freelance writer based in New York City.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

In the middle of the night

Yes, you should be sleeping, but occasionally burning the midnight oil has benefits. Researchers from Albion College and Michigan State University found that creative ideas and insights may crop up more readily when you're tired, perhaps because you're more likely to allow your mind to wander.

