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# New Londoner's diary

Want to know how the fast set stay one step ahead? Set your alarm for six, banish business lunches, catch up with contacts in the gym and unplug after eight. **Susannah Butter** learns how to work it

**W**hat counts as clocking on? Is it when you arrive at the office, or does the working day begin earlier than that, with the first email check of the morning, bright phone illuminating your bed with a backlog of emails sent overnight, to be tackled as you

scramble around for your gym kit and breakfast, delegating domestic admin?

The time constraints of the working day have become nebulous, but one thing is certain – it is under way well before 9am.

The nine to five has been relegated to Dolly Parton karaoke. In its place,

long live the eight to eight. A new study found that the average worker first checks their work email at 7.45am. It sounds like a lot of day to plough through but actually these longer hours are about reclaiming time, with the increasing reliance on devices freeing us from the traditional, and rather tired, work

routines. Gone are the staid patterns of breakfast meeting, presentation, business lunch. Instead, London weekdays are moveable feasts - we rise early to gain agency over our diaries and merge networking with other activities such as exercise and seeing people we actually like. Here is how to work it.

## Pre-work

The only way to fit what you really want or need to do into the working day is to wake up an hour earlier, before the demands of others encroach. These golden early hours are when we can be most selfish.

This means the breakfast meeting is

being phased out – that time is better spent doing a pre-workout, learning a skill or fitting in a beauty treatment. Daniel Galvin is one of the London salons that opens at 8.30am on request. Meanwhile, exercise instructor Zoe Sharp, of Jiva Yoga, says that her 6.30am classes are increasingly popular. “It is a time of day when you’re usually going to be free so it’s a lot easier to squeeze a class in,” she says. “Then it’s out of the way and you don’t need to worry about work running late or not being able to see friends later.”

Studios in the City open early – to get ahead, beat the commuter rush by going there first thing. Zana Morris at The Library Gym says: “The rise of high-intensity workouts, which are shorter, means it is easier to get exercise in before work.”

There are health benefits to exercising in the morning, says Sharp. “Exercising on an empty stomach forces the body to use fat as fuel and raises your metabolism, and if you’ve gone to all the effort to get up and moving you’ll be in a better frame of mind to make healthier food choices for the rest of the day. Pip Black, of Frame studios, adds: “You’ll eave with positive energy, ready to over-achieve for the rest of the day.” Morning yoga wakes you up – Sharp’s clients say they’re far more productive on days when they make it to class. You’ll sleep better too.

Others, including restaurateur Russell Norman and author Haruki Murakami, use the time to write, while psychologist Dr Michael Sinclair wakes up at 6.30am and spends some time with his dog. “I put my phone in a drawer to resist the temptation to start working, and let my mind wander. Doing something self-caring first thing before you get

caught up in the day boosts energy and well-being.”

## At work

A common gripe that people have with their jobs isn’t the nature of their work but the unproductive nonsense that goes with it, like duty lunches and meetings that go on for so long you feel like you age during them and mindlessly boredom-eat your body weight in free pastries.

But thankfully we’ve stopped meeting like this. And indeed eating like this – the free food at places such as Google is generally clean, and Propercorn orders staff lunch from

Le Coq in North London.

These meeting ordeals are trappings of the nine to five, and as it becomes extinct, work is more fun.

Taking the lead from start-up culture, offices are flexible spaces with perks, and formal “sit-down” meetings only when they are unavoidable. A study in the Harvard Business Review confirms what most of us already knew – that meetings are not a productive use of time and money. Far better to settle matters with a few emails, or a Skype call. If people must meet, they do it standing up – fashion empire Net-a-Porter is known for its efficient, chair-free pow-wows.

“No one has time for long lunches any more,” says one PR executive. “People are focused on staying at their desks to make time at work count.” It’s about clever scheduling, says psychologist Emma Kenny: “I tell my clients always to give themselves 15 minutes extra to plan. If you schedule well – for personal life and work – you save 360 hours.” Ditching meetings makes us free to get on with what really matters.



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### Network

No one wants to meet for a morning “coffee and catch-up” – who has time to linger over a lukewarm latte? Instead, it’s all about making the most of the twilight hours between work and play.

At co-working spaces such as Second Home, most networking events are under way by 7.30pm. One executive says: “I don’t want to miss out on meeting people from my industry, and friends, but I have to be tactical about when I do it. During the day is a no-go zone but then if I want to get through the week I have to be home by 9pm – to see the kids and make sure I don’t burn out.”

It’s Ubers at 9pm for Londoners.

Networking is done centrally and with good refreshments. Some offices, like PR agency Red Consultancy, have bars in-house so people can go straight from desk to a debrief with clients in an informal setting. Rose Williams, an Account Manager there, says: “It’s a great way for employees to network internally, and we can invite clients, journalists, and friends. It helps our team build strong internal and external relationships in a more relaxed setting than a formal meeting within traditional working hours, which many people struggle to fit into their day.”

**Plum** + Spilt Milk in King’s Cross is another popular spot. Its owner

Jeremy Robson says: “There is a peak in customers on weekdays from 4.30pm until 9pm. At this time many customers have left their offices and moved work to a more convivial environment. Working a 15-18 hour day is far less of a hardship when it is interspersed with meetings in comfortable surroundings. We have free WiFi and USB sockets at tables to facilitate this work/play merge.”

Others choose to sweatwork. Zana Morris says: “There are people at The Library Gym who treat coming here as a networking event. Their social life has become meeting up with people they have met at classes and

lots have professional relationships too. Being floored by a workout

beside someone else gives you a natural empathy and makes people relax more than if they have the barrier of being in suits.”

### Not Work

If you want a tweet to be noticed the worst time to post is between 8pm and 9am. That’s because it is Not Work, where we ditch devices.

Dr Michael Sinclair says: “I have a client who is a high-powered business leader and turns his phone off between 8pm and 7am. It’s part of him making an effort to wind down so he doesn’t become exhausted with being on constant high alert, plugged in, looking for the next task.” Sinclair adds that this leads to a cortisol

surge, which is not healthy. “Instead of being glued to your phone and multitasking, focus on one thing and try to have some human interaction. We work better when we don’t have too many things to think about.”

Parents have “not work” forced on them. One father, who works in the media, says: “I can never check my phone between around 6pm and 8pm because I’m busy with bedtime and bedtime. But it’s fine to catch up later.” Others have strict box-set schedules to catch up on with their partners and friends.

Evening exercise can be done, but it is different to the pre-workout.

Morris says: “Exercise at this time is about clearing your head instead of

reaching for a glass of wine. You won’t feel like one afterwards. But don’t work out too close to bedtime because it can overstimulate you.”

She recommends eating with others. “If you want to sleep well keep carbs to a minimum. Eat protein, vegetables and good fats such as avocado. That way insulin levels will be stable and you are less likely to wake up with 4am anxiety.”

If conversation feels too ambitious, rejoice that the summer television drought is nearly over, with *The Affair* and *The Returned* starting soon. Just don’t stay up too late.

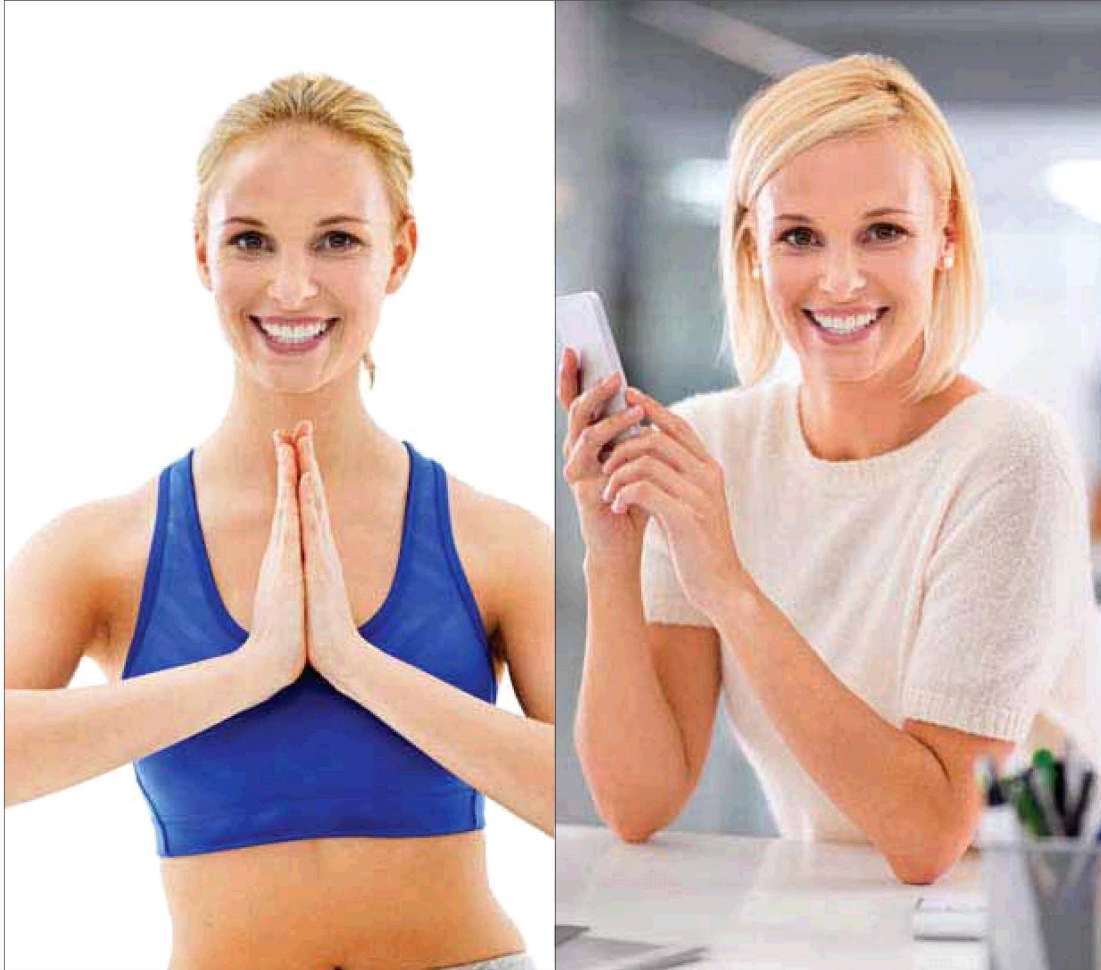
There’s always pre-work in the morning.

*@susannahbutter*



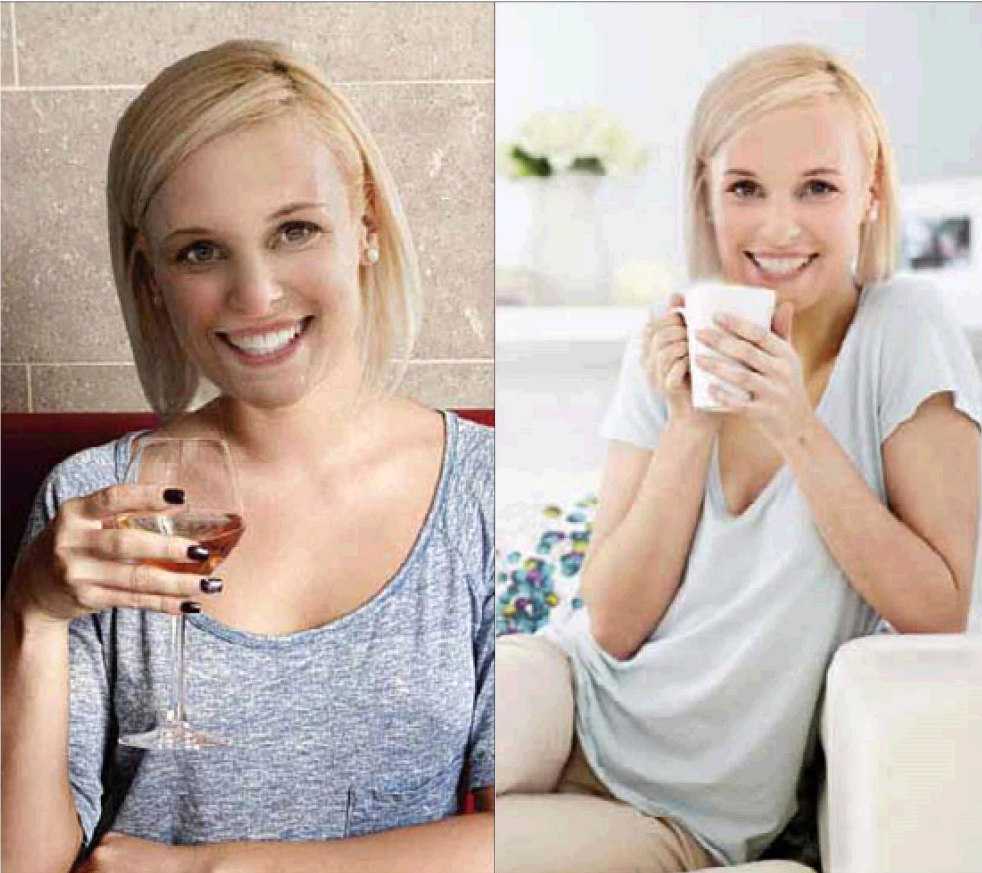
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**Work, rest and play:** make the most of your day by dividing it into strategic portions

