



## Important Things to Know About Teenage Sleep

- Teenagers tend to go to bed later and later as they get older
- Within reason this change is a normal, natural thing
- Teenagers can also go to bed later due to how they behave
- Late bedtimes and wake up times can get in the way of their schooling
- Some simple techniques can help prevent these problems
- If these do not work seek help from a sleep specialist

night and awaken in the morning. Up to a point these are natural changes. However there are other things that can also push the time you go to bed to later hours than desirable or make sense in terms of getting ready for the next day. These include using technology in the hour before going to bed (e.g., mobile phone, computer), and working too late (e.g. excessive homework, part-time evening job). On weekends, staying up too late and sleeping in too much can also upset your natural sleep wake rhythm, pushing your sleep patterns later.

## How common are irregular sleep patterns in teenagers?

On weekends, about 90% of teenagers will go to bed later, and then sleep in. This can be OK if you do not change your weekend bedtimes by too much (no more than 2 hours). However about 40% of teenagers go to bed two or more hours later on weekends. This raises their chances of getting less than 8 hours sleep on school nights.

## How do the sleep patterns of teenagers affect them?

While many teenagers cope with changing their hours of sleep some do not. Signs of not coping include if you are

## What is unique about teenagers' sleep?

Teenagers' sleep tends to be less regular than the sleep of adults and young children. This means that the times when you go to bed on the weekend are not at all the same as on school nights. On weekends, you may go to bed much later. You may also wake up much later on the weekends. Late bedtimes on school nights makes it hard to get enough sleep. This is because you need to wake up early for school. You should aim for at least 8 hours of sleep on school nights.

## What makes teenagers' sleep less regular?

Teenagers' biology works to make them go to bed later. Individual lifestyles play a part in this too. As you grow, you can stay up longer. Your 24-hour 'body clock' can also move later, delaying the time that you feel sleepy at

often late for school, feel sleepy during the day, feel moody or grumpy, and maybe not getting good grades at school.

## What could you do to help cope?

There are ways to help your sleep to be more regular. At night, try to stop using technology earlier, dim the lights earlier, and start to relax earlier. Going to bed at a set time on school nights can help. On weekend mornings, try not to sleep in so long. When you do get out of bed on weekends, try to get a bit more outdoor light, and try to be a bit more active (e.g., get dressed earlier, have breakfast earlier, get moving earlier). See also [Good Sleep Habits](#).

## When should you seek help?

Teenagers may seek help with their sleep for many reasons. But the most common is to make their sleep more regular when they find it hard to get to sleep, and hard to wake up the next day. If you find this happening so that it is hard to get to school, or that it is bad for your school grades, it may be a good time to seek help. You might want to think about a [sleep specialist](#).

## How are irregular sleep /wake hours treated?

The time that you go to bed may have gradually moved later and later. For most teenagers the treatment involves doing the reverse of this i.e. gradually moving the time

you go to bed to earlier hours. As part of the treatment, you go to bed 30 minutes earlier each night and wake up 30 minutes earlier in the morning. You need to make sure that the lights are very low at night and, most importantly, that you get enough bright light in the morning. Outdoor light can work well. These methods are known as Bright Light Therapy. Bright Light Therapy aims to move your internal 24-hour body clock earlier so that you will feel sleepy earlier in the night, and feel more awake in the morning. If your symptoms are ongoing and very severe you may have Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome, where treatment is more complex, but again aims to re-program your internal body clock.

## What else might cause the symptoms?

Irregular sleep patterns and getting less than 8 hours of sleep can be a feature of depression. In some cases, making sleep hours more regular can lead to an improved mood. If not, you should see your family doctor as you may have [depression](#) or [anxiety](#).

## Where can I find out more?

<http://eprints.vu.edu.au/467/>

(This is a comprehensive e-book on teenage sleep)

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep>

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The peak national association of clinicians and scientists devoted to investigation of sleep and its disorders

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Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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**Sleep Health Foundation** ABN 91 138 737 854

114/30 Campbell Street, Blacktown NSW 2148

T: +61 (0) 2 8814 8655 F: +61 (0) 2 9672 3884