



Sleep Support for Adolescents



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What is sleep?

Sleep is...

A natural behaviour – sleep is part of everyone's life. Eventually no matter how hard we fight it we will want to sleep for at least part of every 24 hours.

A reversible state of reduced awareness – to our environment and surroundings.

Dynamic – we do not turn off completely during sleep. There are lots of important processes occurring during sleep that are vital to our existence.

All animals sleep in response to natural rhythms. Human beings are the only animals that deliberately change the amount of sleep they have and their sleep patterns. **Our sleep is getting worse in the 21st century due to our 24/7 lifestyles.**

What does sleep look like?

Sleep patterns are shown as hypnograms – a hypnogram shows what our sleep looks like and the different types of sleep being experienced. The hypnogram below is one for a 14 year old needing to sleep 8-10 hours.

It is important to know that our bodies and brains are doing very specific things at different times during the sleep cycle. Each cycle is comprised of both non-REM and REM sleep.

During non-REM sleep – shown in blue, even though at times we may be in our deepest sleep, our bodies will still be working hard releasing hormones and renewing and repairing tissues.

REM sleep – shown in red, happens increasingly through the night. This is when we do our memory consolidation and is often when we dream.






At various points during the sleep cycle we may wake. This may only be for the briefest moment and we may not remember in the morning.

The Body Clock

Virtually every animal has a body clock that governs their circadian rhythm – Our body clocks are affected by external factors which, in turn, affect our internal rhythm, such as light, temperature, meal times and social activities. These are all important for keeping our body clock in rhythm and letting our body know when it is time to do different functions such as sleep, eat or be alert and able to concentrate.

It is as a result of our circadian rhythm that we are most likely to want to sleep during the dark hours of the late evening and early morning.

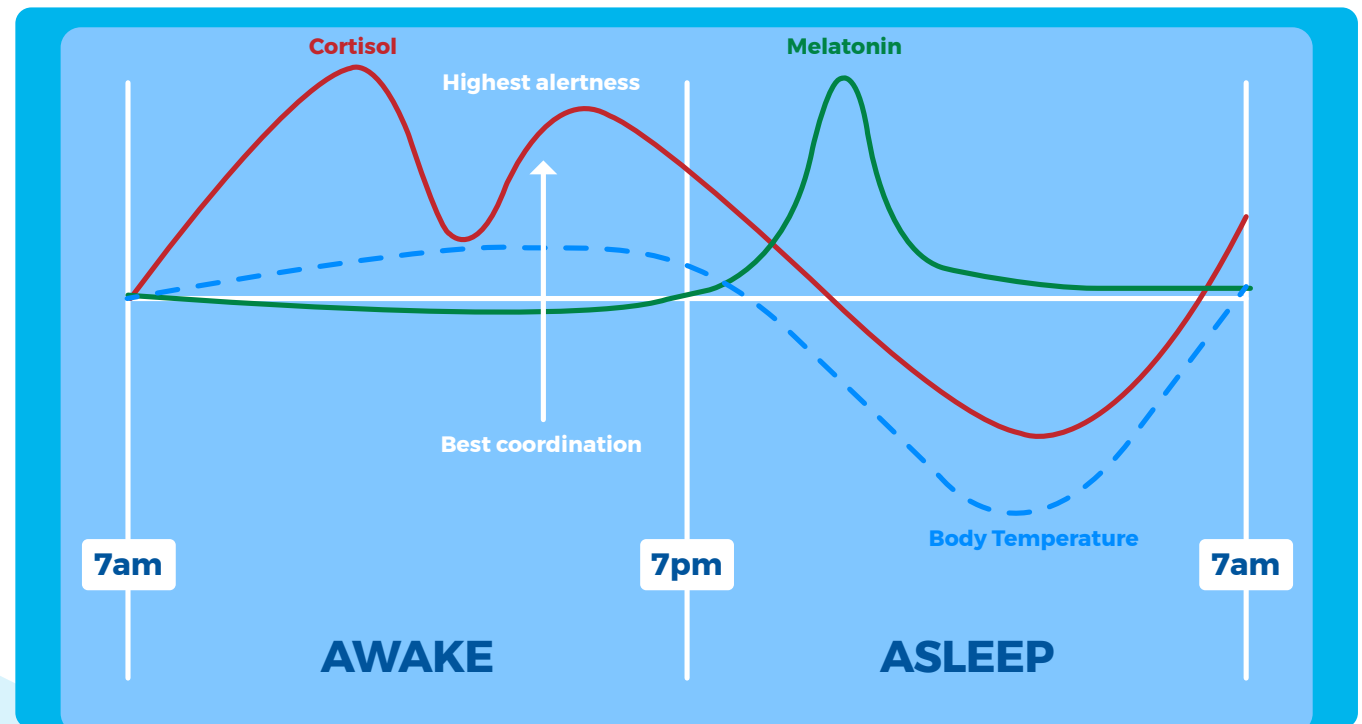
Our body clock manages:

-  Release of certain hormones
-  Sleep
-  Kidney function
-  Temperature
-  Muscle response

Our body clock prompts the release of two hormones which affect our sleep:

Melatonin – often called the ‘sleepy hormone’ because its release is one of the triggers that tells the body that it is time to prepare for sleep. Melatonin is released in response to the change from light to dark.

Cortisol – often called the ‘stress hormone’ because it wakes us up in the morning. Our bodies also create cortisol when we are stimulated. This can be from stress, anxiety or when we are excited. For children, lots of activities can create cortisol in the body such as playing with friends, watching TV or exercising. If we have too much cortisol in our bodies before bed, it will stop us falling asleep.



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The Body Clock (continued)

Disruption to the body clock, or the jet lag effect, is created when a change occurs to your body's settling and waking times. This can often happen at the weekend if an individual goes to bed much later on a Friday and Saturday night and rises much later on a Saturday and Sunday.

The result can be equivalent to travelling across a different time zone and forcing your body to wake and sleep at a different time than your body clock expects. This change occurs again come Monday morning when the individual's waking and settling times are brought forward.

This jet lag effect can make us feel groggy and tired during the day. Mental and physical performance will also be reduced.

Impacts on your sleep

- **Difficulty falling asleep** – by trying to sleep when your body clock is not expecting to, and it is still set on 'wake'. This can be especially pronounced on Sunday night and continue for a few days until your body clock resets itself.
- **Reduced sleep time** – changes in your body clock can disrupt sleep and lead to reduced sleep. If it takes you longer to fall asleep, but you have to wake at a set time, it will reduce your sleep time, leading to sleep deprivation and associated health problems.
- **Difficulty waking in the morning** – if your body clock is set to 'sleep' and you are forcing it to wake up in order to get ready for school or work, you may feel groggy, have a headache, feel easily upset or angry, and nauseous.

These effects may last for a few days before your body clock resets itself. If an individual changes their sleeping and waking times every weekend, it means that they may experience prolonged sleep disruption and sleep deprivation due to constant jet lag effect. This may result in long-term mental and physical health problems.

Sleep and Wellbeing

As your teen grows and goes through the stages of development, it is crucial they are getting enough sleep to support them. Sleep not only refreshes your teen's mind and body but also enhances their body functions.

Benefits of a good night's sleep for your adolescent:



Boosts immunity



Improves memory



Assists learning



Maintains physical and emotional health



Helps the body to repair itself



Promotes growth



Supports a healthy weight

What might be stopping your teen from sleeping?

Their Routine

To make sure their bodies are creating melatonin and reducing cortisol at the right times, children need to have a consistent routine which signals to their body that it's time to sleep. Changes in bedtime routine or exciting activities just before bed can stop children from sleeping.

- Make sure there is time to go outside and be active during the day, ideally before dinner. Getting daylight in the morning is helpful.
- Try to avoid your teen having a nap after 2pm. This includes falling asleep on the bus or in front of the TV. Many teens spend a lot of time in their room, and a falling asleep after school is common.
- Avoid stimulating activities which are loud or energetic in the hour before bed. Instead encourage your teen to have wind down activities, such as drawing, reading, or listening to music or audio books.
- Ensure your teen understands the importance of going to bed and waking up at the same time every day – even at the weekends!

Their Environment

Many teens spend a lot of time in their bedrooms during the day, but it's important that bedrooms become quiet, calm and dark before bedtime. Any stimulation before bed may keep your child awake. This could include sleeping in the same room as siblings, or spending time on electronic devices before bed.

- Where possible, try to ensure your teen has a quiet, calm, dark bedroom to sleep in.
- Make sure your teen understands the importance of switching off electronics in the hour before bed.

Lights & Electronics

If your teen is interacting with anything that produces light before bed, this could be keeping them awake. While phones, TVs or tablets may seem to have a calming influence, the blue light emitted by screens is likely to prevent their bodies creating melatonin and the interaction can increase cortisol levels.

- Avoid activities which use screens an hour before bed and keep screens out of their bedroom. This will likely need some negotiation!

More on next page...



What might be stopping your teen from sleeping? (continued)

Their Diet

Without regular meal times, your teen's body clock can struggle to regulate sleep consistently. Stimulants such as sugar and caffeine, especially in the evening will prevent sleep. Snacks less than an hour before bedtime may also disrupt their sleep.

- Avoid any stimulating food or drinks including chocolate, coffee, tea, or cola in the late afternoon or evening.
- If they want a snack after dinnertime, try milk, toast or a banana, and have this is at least an hour before bed.

Anxiety

There's lots of things that may make our young people anxious and this creates cortisol in their bodies before bed. Some are anxious about school, exams, relationships, and even not being able to fall asleep. Encourage your teen to express how they are feeling and talk about what is making them feel this way. Do this earlier in the day, so they don't bring those feelings to the bedroom.

- Find ways to relax together using relaxation techniques, yoga or mindfulness.
- Try to stay calm around bedtime to support your child to feel the same.

Changes In Their Life

This could be things such as leaving school, bereavement, or parents separating. Big changes in life may make it hard for your teen to relax before bed or may make their routine inconsistent, which could disrupt their body clock.

- Do what you can to give your teen as much consistency as possible, and encourage them to take charge and do the same.
- Reassure them that they can talk about their thoughts and feelings during transitional times.



Good Bedtime Practice

Example of a good bedtime routine for a 14 year old who is getting up around 7am. This can be used as a rough guide, but you might want to adjust timings and activities to suit your family. Create the plan with your teen so they can take charge of their own sleep. Remember that consistency is key!

A Good Bedtime Schedule

Time	Activity
4:00pm	After school clubs / time with friends
5:30pm	Evening meal
6:00pm	Stimulating activity - exercise, screen time, complete homework
8pm	Snack/supper, if needed
8:30pm	Wind down activity
9:00pm	Relaxing bath
9:30pm	Read or listen to music or an audio book
9:45pm	Lights out

Average Sleep Needs

Age	Recommended
Early secondary-aged children 11-13 years	9 to 11 hours
Teenagers 14-17 years	8 to 10 hours
Young adults 18-25 years	7 to 9 hours

Based on recommendations by the National Sleep Foundation. These are guidance, but everyone is different. Use a school holiday for your teen to sleep as long as they need to, to find out how much sleep they need.

Before Bed:

- Avoid sleeping after 2pm
- No TV etc. an hour before bed
- Quiet, wind down time
- Snack if required, e.g. toast, cereal, milky drink
- Avoid sweets/ biscuits, fizzy drinks, tea, coffee, hot chocolate
- An hour before bed, aim to leave the day behind and prepare for sleep onset

Bedtime:

- Consistent bedtime and waking
- Carry out steps in same order each night
- Have a bath, wind down, chill out
- Read, or listen to relaxing music
- Try a relaxation technique to help drift off
- Keep bedroom dark and cool
- Use subdued lighting

Crucial elements

- Consistency
- Timing
- Diet
- Exercise
- Daytime behaviour



Supporting every child to get a good night's sleep

Sleep Action Face to Face Sleep Counselling

See our website for your local area sleep counselling provision.

www.sleepaction.org

Sleep Support Line

Our trained sleep counsellors are available to offer advice and guidance on your child or teenager's sleep issues.

Monday to Thursday, 10am to 4pm

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Get in touch

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