



# Sleep Support for Teenagers

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# What is sleep?

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## 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.

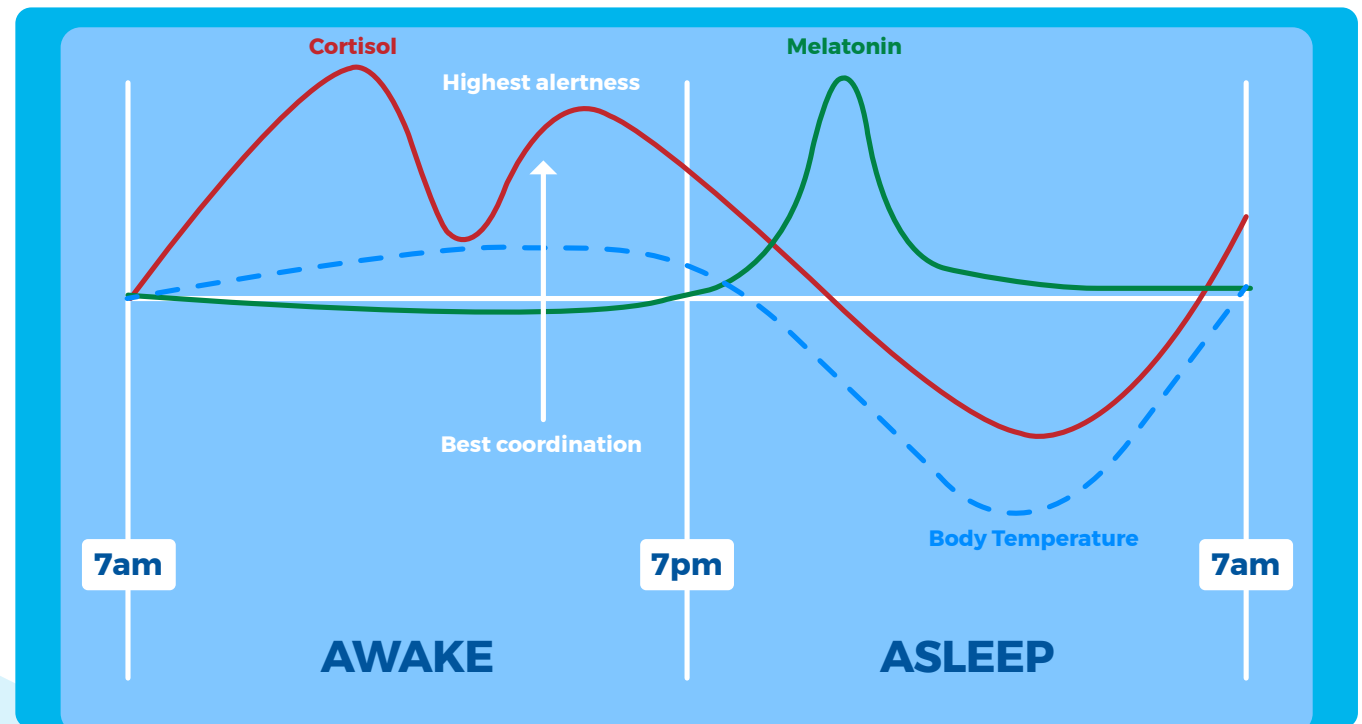
## Our body clock manages:

-  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 you go to bed much later on a Friday and Saturday night and rise 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 your wake 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 you grow and go through the stages of development, it is crucial you are getting enough sleep. Sleep not only refreshes your mind and body, but also enhances your body functions.

### Benefits of a good night's sleep for you:



**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 you from sleeping?

## Your Routine

To make sure your body is creating melatonin and reducing cortisol at the right times, you need to have a consistent routine which signals to your body that it's time to sleep. Changes in bedtime routine or exciting activities just before bed can stop you 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 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 falling asleep after school is common.
- Avoid stimulating activities which are loud or energetic in the hour before bed. Instead try calm wind down activities, such as drawing, reading, or listening to music or audio books.
- Understand the importance of going to bed and waking up at the same time every day – even at the weekends!

## Your 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 you awake. This could include sleeping in the same room as siblings, or spending time on electronic devices before bed.

- Where possible, try to ensure you have a quiet, calm, dark bedroom to sleep in.
- Switching off electronics in the hour before bed can help with that wind down and preparation for sleep.

## Lights & Electronics

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

- Avoid activities which use screens an hour before bed and switch off notifications or anything that may wake you through the night.

**More on next page...**



# What might be stopping you from sleeping? (continued)

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## Your Diet

Without regular meal times, your 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 your sleep.

Avoid any stimulating food or drinks including chocolate, coffee, tea, or cola in the late afternoon or evening.

If you want a snack after dinnertime, try milk, or toast, and have this is at least an hour before bed.

## Anxiety

There are lots of things that may make us feel anxious and this creates cortisol in our bodies before bed. This could be school, exams, relationships, and even not being able to fall asleep. Find a way to express how you are feeling and talk with someone you trust about what is making you feel this way. Do this earlier in the day, so you don't bring those feelings to the bedroom.

Find ways to relax before bed using relaxation techniques, yoga or mindfulness.

## Changes In Your Life

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

Do what you can to have as much consistency as possible. Disruption to your life may affect your sleep, but try not to worry about a few bad night's sleep - try to get back on track as soon as you can and try not to worry.



# Good Bedtime Practice

See below for an example of a 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 you. Remember that consistency is key - try to keep your routine the same each day!

## 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
8:45pm	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. Not sure how much sleep you need? Use a school holiday to sleep as long as you need to, to find out how much sleep you really 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 wakening

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



## Supporting everyone to thrive through healthy sleep

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### **Sleep Action Face to Face Sleep Counselling**

See our website for your local area sleep counselling provision.

[www.sleepaction.org](http://www.sleepaction.org)

### **Sleep Support Line**

Our trained sleep counsellors are available to offer advice and guidance on sleep issues for any child or young person aged 18 months to 18 years old.

Monday to Thursday, 10am to 4pm

[sleepsupport@sleepaction.org](mailto:sleepsupport@sleepaction.org)

### **Get in touch**

[enquiries@sleepaction.org](mailto:enquiries@sleepaction.org)