

# Going to bed a little earlier greatly increases total sleep time for teens

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Going to bed earlier is one way for teens to get the sleep they need, new

research suggests.

That may be easier said than done, the researchers admitted. But their study shows that if you can get teens to go to bed earlier, they will increase their time asleep by 41 minutes for each additional hour in bed.

"The idea that there's a circadian phase delay that prevents teens from going to bed earlier is not true," said lead researcher [Ian Campbell](#), a project scientist in the department of psychiatry and [behavioral sciences](#) at the University of California, Davis.

Circadian phase delay occurs when your [sleep pattern](#) is delayed two hours or more from a conventional [sleep](#) pattern, causing you to go to sleep later and wake up later.

As children enter adolescence, changes in sleep and [circadian rhythms](#) make it easy for teens to stay awake longer at night. Less sleep results in [daytime sleepiness](#), poor school performance, and behavioral and [mental health problems](#), Campbell said.

Teens have been getting less sleep, he said, with smartphones, tablets, gaming and increased school pressure all contributing to less sleep.

Campbell's team's goal is to figure out the ideal amount of sleep needed at the various stages of life to achieve the best school performance.

Instead of starting school later, which has been suggested as a way to get kids more sleep, asking teens to go to bed earlier could work, Campbell said.

"This is a paper [that] came out of our study of how sleep needs change across adolescence, and the main goal of that is to alter [sleep duration](#) by advancing time in bed with three different times in bed

conditions—seven, 8.5 and 10 hours in bed—and look at how that affects daytime performance," he said.

The final results of the best sleep patterns for teens aren't complete, Campbell said. So how much sleep teens need and when is the best time to go to bed and wake up aren't yet clear.

"But just the basic fact that they are able to increase their sleep duration by advancing their bedtime, we thought was worthy of letting people know that that was successful," he explained.

For the study, Campbell and his colleagues enrolled 77 kids, aged 10 to 16, who were studied over three years. In addition, they studied another group of 67 participants who ranged in age from 15 to 21. This group was studied only once.

Annually, participants kept three predetermined times in bed—seven, 8.5, and 10 hours for four consecutive nights. They also kept the same wake-up time.

The investigators found that by the fourth night, average sleep increased by more than an hour as the time in bed increased from seven to nine hours, and it increased by an additional hour with 10 hours in bed.

Although teens slept slightly less as they aged, earlier bedtime increased sleep, regardless of age, the researchers noted.

The findings were published online June 12 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Despite the finding, one expert fears it would be hard to get teens to go to bed earlier, given all they have to do and all the distractions they face.

"My biggest concern is you have to incentivize these teenagers to go into

bed at the earliest because 90% of the time it's not only biological, but also environment," said [Dr. Sanjeev Kothare](#), chief of pediatric neurology at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

"So the circadian shift happens but, unfortunately, all the electronics and [social media](#) and the technology keeps teens occupied for longer durations," he said.

Teens need about eight to 8.5 hours of sleep every night, Kothare said. "And one thing is for sure, we know that not sleeping adequate hours on weekdays and trying to compensate on weekends by taking naps and longer duration of sleep does actually not work," he added.

Starting school later is a good idea, but it's fraught with problems, from difficulty setting bus schedules to parents' work schedules, Kothare said.

"The problem is can you somehow incentivize these teenagers to close off all their blue light sources and get into bed so that they get more hours of sleep at night," Kothare said. "I think if they can be convinced that it is doable and that there is a reward for it, they will do it."

**More information:** For more on teens and sleep, head to the [Sleep Foundation](#).

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