

Importance of Maintaining a Sleep Schedule

To maintain peak performance, it has been recommended that we receive adequate amounts of sleep varying from 7-9 hours. While sleep duration has been the major focus for maintaining ones long-term cognitive and behavioural function, an often overlooked concern is how ones *sleep schedule* affects everyday function.

A good sleep schedule is defined by a consistent bedtime, sleep duration, and wake time. Timing and duration of sleep may change as a child ages, but typical patterns emerge that tend to persist as the child matures. For example, those that tend to be long sleepers as children are typically long sleepers, as they get older; as well those that prefer earlier or later bedtimes will maintain these preferences. As the circadian system is slow to adapt, children with highly variable bed and sleep time may experience constant fatigue and mental confusion similar to jet lag, resulting in increased sleepiness and behavioural dysfunction.

Persistent variation of bedtime may disrupt our optimal circadian entrainment, which is set to a 24 hour circadian rhythm. Entrainment is affected by temperature, behavioral cues, night arousals, and light exposure. Consistent schedule or social rhythm is associated with a better-entrained circadian system.

Factors contributing to inconsistent sleep schedule:

- poor sleeping environment & sleep hygiene
- technology in the bedroom
- changes in school schedule
- parent work schedules & after school activities

Researchers reported that regular sleep schedules in children are associated with better school adjustment and behavior, whereas poor or varied sleep time is associated with increased anxiety and depression. A study from *Sleep Medicine* of approx. 1600 adolescents demonstrated that bedtime variation of over 120 minutes significantly increased the risk of behavioral issues compared to a variation of 30 minutes or less. The increased risk was consistent regardless of week days and weekends. Research has also found this in adults with varied working hours. For example, 4th year medical students showed that only actual sleep timing during the semesters, particularly during weeks prior to exams significantly influenced performance, whereas sleep duration and quality did not have significant effects. Those with consistent sleep schedules were found to achieve better grades.

Ways to Maintain Your Sleep Schedule:

Establish a regular, relaxing, bedtime routine

Try to keep high-level tasks/activities until morning in order to avoid bringing your problems to bed.

Exercise can promote good sleep

Vigorous exercise should be taken in the morning or early afternoon. A relaxing exercise, like yoga, can be done before bed to help initiate a restful night's sleep.

According to sleep experts, a regular schedule not only tends to increase the amount of sleep people get each night, it can also improve the quality of that sleep.

Source: [Med School and Sleep](#) & [Sleep Medicine](#)

For more information about sleep, visit

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