Natural Night Owl? Here’s How to Reset Your Sleep Schedule

5 MIN READ

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BY KELLE WALSH

Why staying up past midnight, even if you’re a natural night owl, can raise your risk of depression and anxiety, and how to reset your sleep for better mood and longevity.

You might call yourself a night owl. Maybe your most creative hours start around 10 p.m., or you relish the quiet solitude that only arrives once the rest of the world has powered down. We get it.

But new research suggests that the late-night lifestyle may come at a cost to your mental health.

How to Reset a Night Owl Sleep Schedule for Better Mental Health

In a massive study out of **Stanford University School of Medicine**, researchers tracked the sleep habits of more than 73,000 adults, many of them in midlife or older. What they found was striking: people who regularly stayed up past 1 a.m. had a 20–40% higher risk of developing depression or anxiety.

This held true even for “evening chronotypes,” people whose natural circadian rhythms are tilted later. So, even if your biology leans night owl, regularly pushing bedtime past midnight could still put your mental health at risk. But let’s back up. What’s a sleep chronotype?

How Late Nights Increase Risk of Depression and Anxiety

The Stanford team looked at more than just bedtime; they tracked chronotype (your natural sleep-wake cycle), sleep quality, and mental health symptoms over time. Here's what they found:

- **Morning people** who went to bed before 10 p.m. had the best mental health outcomes across the board.
- **Evening types** did *better* when they adopted an earlier schedule, meaning, your biology might lean night owl, but behavior matters more.
- **Late sleepers** who regularly stayed up past 1 a.m. experienced significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and mood dysregulation, regardless of whether they felt like their schedule "fit" them.

Why Sleep Timing May Matter More Than Sleep Quantity

Your body's internal clock, aka your **circadian rhythm**, regulates much more than just sleep. It influences hormone production, mood regulation, immune function, digestion, and even how your brain clears waste. When that rhythm is disrupted (as it often is by late nights), your mental and physical health pay the price.

The hours between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. are when your body and brain get the deepest, most restorative rest. Miss that window too often, and your stress hormones may stay elevated, while your mood-regulating systems struggle to keep up.

Simple Sleep Reset Habits That Boost Mental Health

You don’t have to become a 5 a.m. yoga person overnight. Small, consistent changes to your evening routine can gradually shift your internal clock:

- **Wind down earlier**: Dim lights, skip the screens, and give your nervous system a cue that it’s time to power down.
- **Avoid stimulants**: Caffeine after noon? Probably not helping. Alcohol before bed? It disrupts REM sleep.
- **Check out the Do’s and Don’ts of Sleep Mastery**: Blue light? No. Sleep mask? Yes? Cannabis? Think twice. **Here are five sleep insights**, plus a Yoga Nidra practice for winding down.

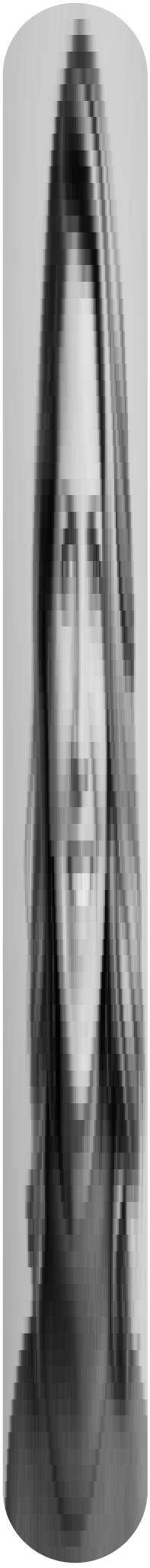
One of the most powerful tools in your longevity toolkit? Going to bed a little earlier.

You don’t need to aim for perfection. But aiming for consistency, and aligning your sleep with your body’s natural rhythm, can be a game-changer. Because thriving at any age starts with protecting your energy, your focus, and your joy. And good sleep is where all of that begins.

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WRITTEN BY:



Kelle Walsh