



# sleep and young people

## putting the myths to rest

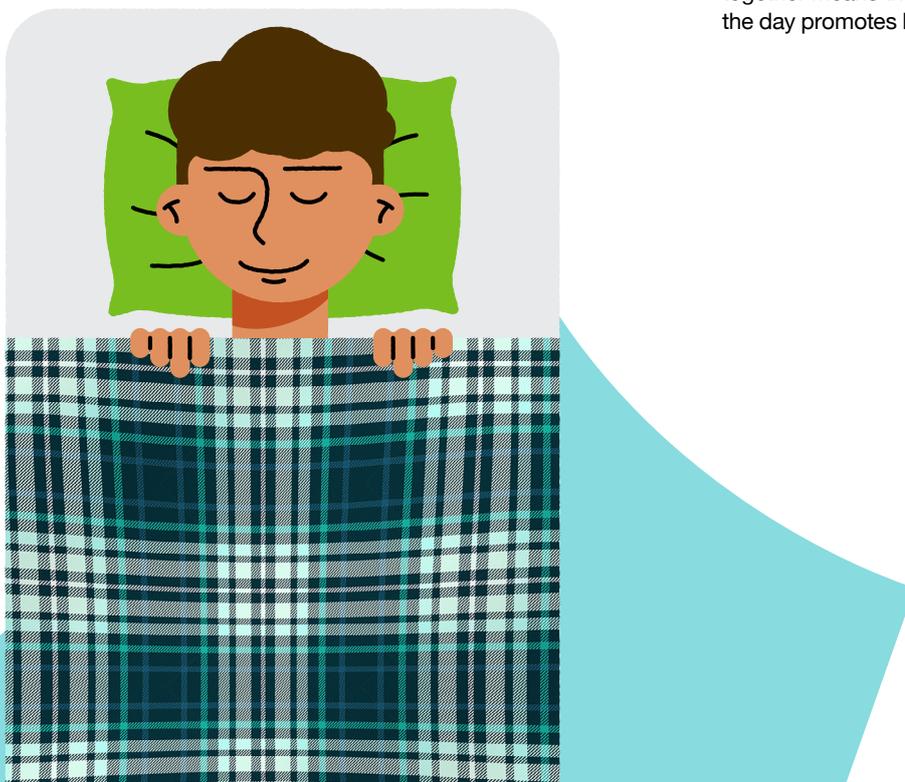
**Sleep is really important for health and wellbeing. This mythbuster explores some common myths around sleep, using research evidence. It also provides an overview of sleep difficulties experienced by young people. This resource is intended for young people, their families and friends, and health professionals.**

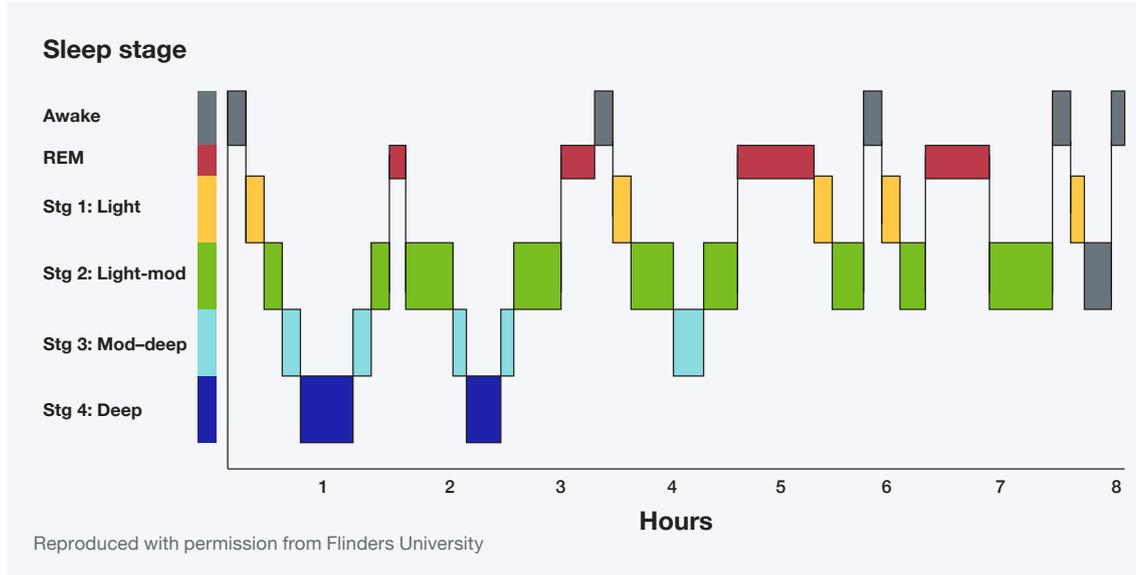
### Why do we sleep?

We tend to think of sleep as a time when the mind and body shut down, but they are actually performing many vital tasks during sleep.

Two biological processes cause us to sleep: sleep pressure and our body clock (circadian rhythm). Sleep pressure is a biological response that makes us want to go to sleep. From the moment we wake up, sleep pressure begins to gradually increase the longer we are awake.<sup>1</sup>

Our body clock is on roughly a 24-hour cycle. This cycle is coordinated by the pathways from our eyes to our brain that detect light and dark (i.e. day and night). In the evening, our bodies release the hormone melatonin, which prepares the body for sleep. We also experience a small drop in body temperature.<sup>2</sup> Both of these help to keep us asleep across the night. The way that sleep pressure and the body clock work together means that sleeping at night and being awake during the day promotes both optimal sleep and functioning.<sup>3</sup>

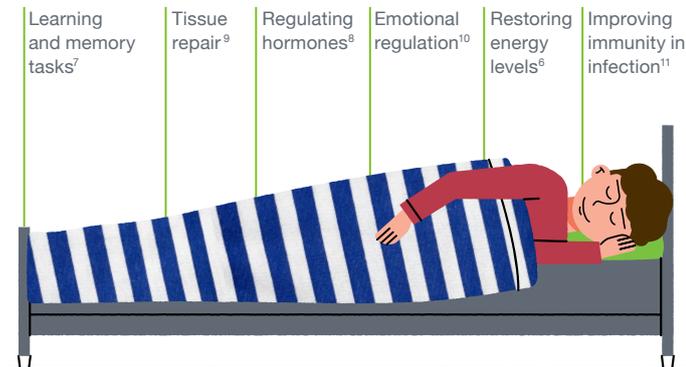




### What happens when we sleep?

We cycle through two types of sleep each night: non-rapid eye movement (N-REM) and rapid eye movement (REM).<sup>4</sup> The reason why our sleep is divided into these two separate types is not fully understood, but they appear to provide different functions.<sup>5</sup> As seen in the chart, N-REM sleep has four 'deepening stages' of sleep from Stage 1–4.

In REM sleep, during which we are more likely to experience dreams, our brain is as active as when we are awake. The amount of REM sleep increases in the second half of the sleep period, so 7–9 hours of sleep (or more for teenagers aged 12–17) is ideally needed in order to have the right balance of REM and N-REM sleep.<sup>6</sup>



### How much sleep do young people need?

The U.S. National Sleep Foundation has provided guidelines for the recommended amount of sleep.<sup>6</sup>

	Recommended	May be appropriate	Not recommended
School age children 6–13 years	9–11 hours	7–12 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 12 hours
Teenagers 14–17 years	8–10 hours	7–11 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 11 hours
Young adults 18–25 years	7–9 hours	6–11 hours	Less than 6 hours More than 11 hours

So how much sleep are young people actually getting? A recent review found that teenagers (14–17 years) in Australia were sleeping 6.5–7.5 hours on school nights, with young adults (18–24 year olds) only getting the minimal requirements during the working week.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, young people are gaining more sleep when they have fewer early morning commitments, like on weekends.<sup>13</sup>