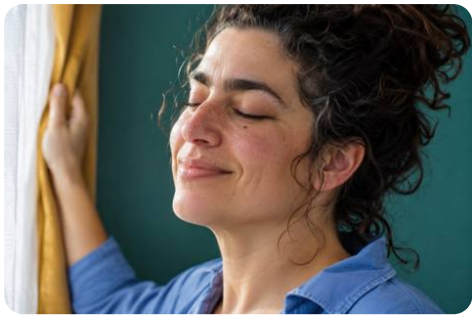
NEWS LESSON

What If Some Depression Is Really a Body-Clock Problem?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. How does a poor night's sleep affect your mood and concentration?
2. Do you think schools and workplaces pay enough attention to different sleep patterns?
3. Why can the same treatment work for one person and not for another?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**alertness**	☐	A	connected with genes, which pass from parents to children
2	**ancestry**	☐	B	medicine that a doctor gives you
3	**serotonin**	☐	C	the state of being awake and ready to think
4	**persistent**	☐	D	a doctor's decision about which illness a person has
5	**medication**	☐	E	the family and places that a person's relatives come from
6	**diagnosis**	☐	F	continuing for a long time without stopping
7	**genetic**	☐	G	a chemical in the body that affects mood
8	**symptoms**	☐	H	signs in your body or mind that show you are ill

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Australian researchers have described a possible subtype of depression linked to the body's internal clock. The finding is early, and it does not change what anyone should do about their own treatment.

1 Most of us know someone who finds mornings easy and someone who comes alive late at night. These differences are partly controlled by the body's internal clock, which helps regulate sleep, alertness and other processes over roughly 24 hours. Australian researchers have now identified a possible subtype of depression connected with disruption to this system. The findings suggest that some patients may need a different treatment approach rather than simply more of the same medication.

2 The University of Sydney reported the research on 21 October 2026. Scientists analysed clinical and genetic information from more than 10,000 Australians who had experienced depression. They identified 2,604 participants, nearly a quarter of the sample, whose symptoms fitted a pattern the team described as circadian depression. These participants mostly had severe, recurrent or persistent depression, so the percentage should not be taken as a figure for everyone who experiences low mood or depression.

3 Features of the proposed subtype included a tendency to sleep for longer during depressive periods, waking up exhausted, a preference for late nights and sometimes seasonal changes in symptoms. Based on what participants reported about their own treatment, common serotonin-based antidepressants appeared less effective for this group. The researchers suggested that treatments targeting the body's daily rhythm, such as certain medicines or light therapy, might deserve greater attention, although this study did not test them. The hope is that recognising different patterns earlier will help patients avoid long periods of unsuccessful treatment.

4 However, it would be a mistake to conclude that people develop depression simply because they have unhealthy sleep habits. The relationship between sleep, biology and mental health is complicated. A person can have a late bedtime without being depressed, and many people with depression have no obvious body-clock difficulties. The researchers looked for a clinically meaningful pattern, not a convenient explanation for every case. Their work also raises questions that further studies will need to investigate.

5 There is another important limitation. The findings come from a particular Australian sample, which was mostly women and limited to people of European ancestry, and identifying a subtype is not the same as proving that a specific treatment will work for every person in that category. Doctors must still consider an individual's complete medical history. People who are worried about their treatment should talk to a doctor and should not stop, start or change medication because of an article. That would risk doing more harm than good.

6 Even so, the research may help change the way people think about mental health. We often talk about depression as if it is one single illness with one clear solution. In reality, two people with the same diagnosis may have very different symptoms and needs. Paying closer attention to sleep patterns could eventually help clinicians choose more suitable care. If personal treatment is the goal, should doctors ask much more about how patients sleep and structure their days?

Sources: The Guardian, Australian researchers identify new subtype of depression linked to body clock disruptions; University of Sydney, Researchers identify new circadian subtype of depression. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The study included more than 10,000 Australians. T F NG
2. The 2,604 participants represent everyone with depression. T F NG
3. All of the participants lived in Sydney. T F NG
4. The study shows that light therapy works for people with circadian depression. T F NG
5. People should change their medication if an article suggests it. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

annual	convenient	disruption	exhausted	recurrent	shortage	tendency	unsuccessful

1. A _____ to stay up late can run in families.
2. A _____ illness returns again and again, sometimes after months of feeling well.
3. It would be _____ to blame everything on sleep, because that avoids the harder questions.
4. After two _____ attempts to treat her illness, the doctor tried a different approach.
5. A power cut caused a major _____ to train services across the city.
6. After three night shifts in a row, he felt completely _____ .

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. These differences are partly _____ by the body's internal clock. (CONTROL)
2. Australian researchers have now _____ a possible subtype of depression. (IDENTIFY)
3. Scientists analysed information from people who had _____ depression. (EXPERIENCE)
4. People should not _____ medication because of an article. (CHANGE)
5. The University of Sydney _____ the research on 21 October 2026. (REPORT)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many collocations are verb + noun or adjective + noun. Say the whole chunk aloud so it sounds natural.

changes	habit	harm	history	mood	nights	reason

1. Changing medication without advice could do more _____ than good.
2. Teenagers often enjoy late _____ at the weekend.
3. Some people notice low _____ during the dark winter months.
4. A doctor will ask about your complete medical _____ .
5. Many people report seasonal _____ in their energy and sleep.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Should doctors ask more questions about sleep when they assess mental health?
2. Why is it important not to confuse a possible link with a definite cause?
3. How would you feel if your doctor said your illness had a different subtype from your friend's?

9 Role-play: should I stop my medicine?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the doctor

Your patient has read a news story about body clocks and wants to stop their medicine. Ask about their sleep and how they feel. Explain why they shouldn't change anything without advice.

Student B · the patient

You read a story about body clocks and depression. You're worried your medicine isn't working. Explain why you want to stop, and ask the doctor what you can do instead.

Useful phrases

I read a story about body clocks.
I'm thinking of stopping my medicine.
I'd like to understand why it isn't working.
That's an early study, so please don't stop yet.
Let's talk about your sleep first.
What's the safest next step?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the patient decide to keep the medicine, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 C · 2 E · 3 G · 4 F · 5 B · 6 D · 7 A · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 tendency · 2 recurrent · 3 convenient · 4 unsuccessful · 5 disruption · 6 exhausted

6 Verb forms

1 controlled · 2 identified · 3 experienced · 4 change · 5 reported

7 Language focus

1 harm · 2 nights · 3 mood · 4 history · 5 changes

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