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Is 'Social Jet Lag' Making You Fat?

Social jet lag, a term coined by researchers in Europe, refers to the discrepancy between your natural body clock and your social clock — the schedule you need to keep for your job and other social commitments. If you're relying on an alarm clock to wake up every morning during the week, but sleeping in on weekends, you're probably experiencing what researchers call "social jet lag" and it could be making you fat.

The consequences can be far-reaching. In this study, researchers surveyed the sleep habits of more than 65,000 adults and found that people whose weekend and weekday sleep schedules differed were three times more likely to be overweight than those who went to bed and awoke at the same time each day. The greater the difference between weekend and weekday sleeping, the fatter people were.

Although the study doesn't prove that sleep-deprivation directly causes weight gain, the findings fall in line with many studies which have linked inadequate sleep with a variety of health problems, including obesity, depression and chronic diseases like diabetes.

Researchers suggest that we should encourage personalized schedules based on each individual's rhythms, rather than bending early birds and night owls to the same work schedule. The result would be a better-rested, healthier, and doubtless more productive workforce.

Adapted from Time Magazine, May 2012