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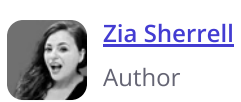
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Study Finds Way to Help Teenagers Get Extra Sleep

Sleep

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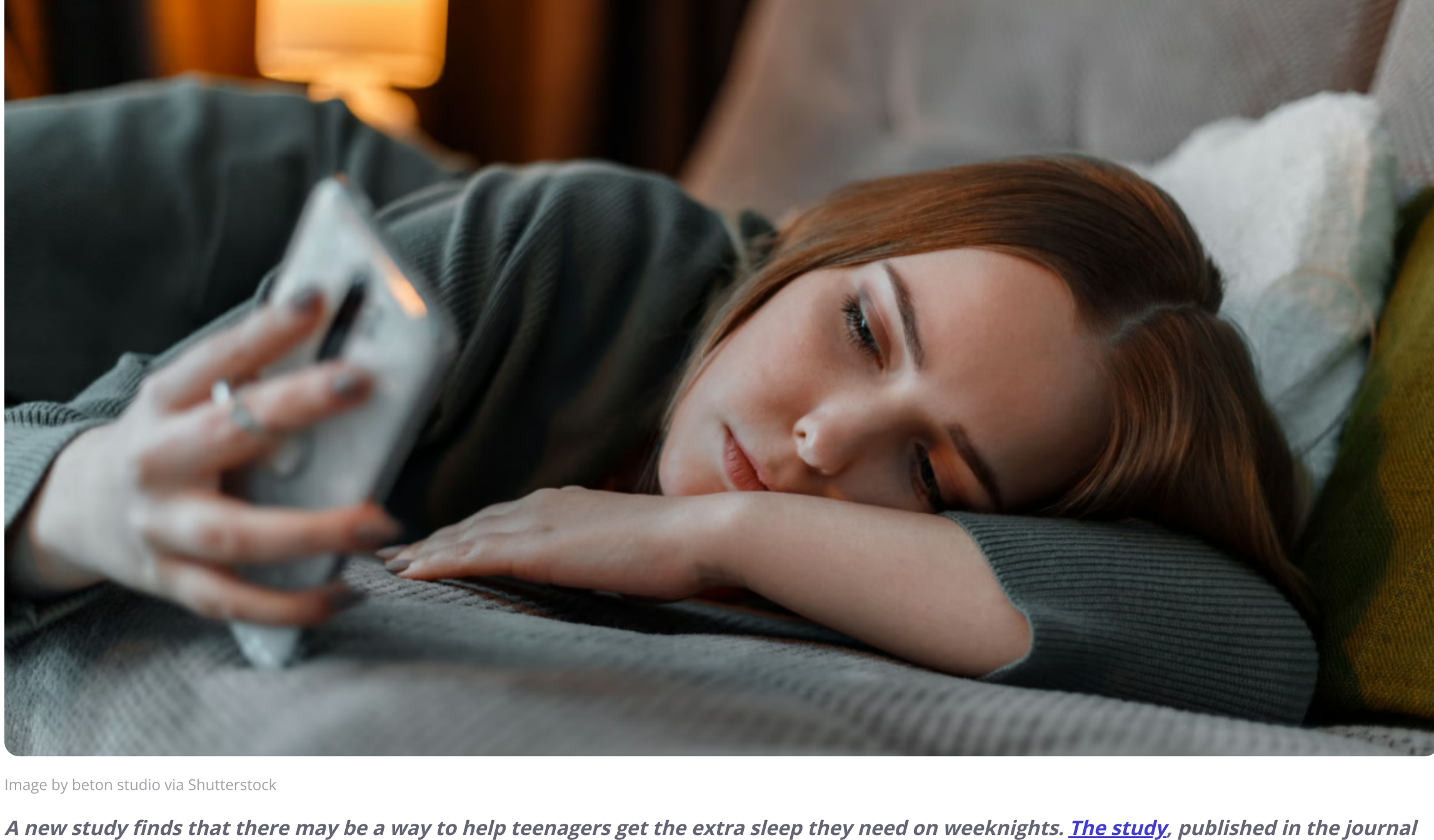


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A new study finds that there may be a way to help teenagers get the extra sleep they need on weeknights. [The study](#), published in the journal *Sleep*, found that using bright light therapy could shift teenagers' internal clocks, allowing them to fall asleep earlier.

Key takeaways:

- Teenagers need a minimum of 8 hours of sleep for their health and well-being.
- Many teenagers struggle to get enough sleep as their body clocks shift and favor late bedtimes.
- A new study shows that bright-light therapy can help shift the body's internal clock.
- Together with time management strategies, these practices can improve sleep quality in teenagers.

Following a long summer of late nights and even later mornings, it can be hard for teenagers to readjust to a school schedule in the fall. A disturbed sleep schedule and lack of sleep can lead to fatigue, poor performance in school, and changes in mood and focus. Therefore, supporting teens and finding ways to help them get more sleep is crucial.

Although preliminary, the study's findings suggest that light therapy is a promising intervention for sleep problems in teenagers. It's also non-invasive, relatively low-cost, and could be easily implemented at home.

The importance of sleep

Restorative sleep is critical for health. During sleep, the body rests and repairs itself. It's also when the brain consolidates memories and new information. The benefits of a good night's sleep are especially important for teenagers, who are still growing and developing. They need a minimum of [8 to 10 hours](#) each night.

[Without enough sleep](#), the risk of chronic health conditions issues increases. **These include:**

- Heart disease;
- Kidney problems;
- High blood pressure;
- Diabetes;
- Stroke;
- Obesity.

Sleep deficiency also contributes to mental health problems like anxiety and depression, moodiness and irritability, impaired judgment, and increased accidents and injuries.

Although getting enough sleep is critical, around [7 in 10 high school students](#) in grades 9 to 12 don't get enough sleep on school nights.

Teenagers and sleep issues

The teenage years are a time of significant physical and emotional changes. Teens also experience changes in their sleep biology, meaning they tend to go to bed and wake up later.

The reason is a shift in the body's 24-hour circadian rhythm — the internal process that regulates the sleep-wake cycle. As a result, teens may develop delayed sleep phase syndrome (DSPS).

DSPS is a common condition that's accentuated during adolescence when there are two competing forces — the pressures of a school schedule and the need to go to bed early and the biological changes in the body. The result is that many teenagers are sleep-deprived.

How light therapy could help

The conflicting relationship between the shift in circadian rhythm and the need for an early night's sleep prompted researchers' interest in light therapy. In the *Sleep* study, they tested a 2-week intervention focusing on the circadian system and using various behavioral measures. The aim was to help teenagers maintain a better nighttime routine.

The researchers recruited adolescents who typically had late bedtimes and less than 7 hours of sleep each night. For 2 weeks, the participants followed their normal sleep pattern to establish a baseline. Then, they received bright light therapy for 2.5 hours on the 2 weekend mornings.

Bright light therapy, also known as phototherapy, is similar to sunlight. Exposing the eyes to intense but safe amounts of light for a specific and regular length of time resets the internal clock and helps shift the circadian rhythm. The therapy involves sitting in front of a light box for a predetermined amount of time.

The participants gradually advanced their week-night bedtime to 1 hour earlier than baseline during the first week and 2 hours earlier during the second week. They also received personalized time management plans — Sleep RouTeen — to help facilitate earlier bedtimes.

The control group who didn't follow the same light therapy protocol slept as usual and had no evening time management plan. The weekday sleep onset time and duration were measured with sensors.

Ultimately, the researchers shifted the teenagers' bedtime by 1.5 hours and increased total sleep time by 1 hour each night through the intervention. Plus, the teens felt less tired, irritable, and worried and had improved concentration and alertness.

The authors noted that the participants with late circadian clocks shifted their sleep by up to 2 hours earlier. However, those with an earlier circadian clock didn't shift their bedtime but benefited from the behavioral support of time management to increase sleep duration.

Changing sleeping patterns

The research findings suggest that it's possible to [change the sleep patterns](#) of young adults with DSPS by manipulating their exposure to light and providing time management strategies.

One significant advantage of light therapy is that it's safe and easy to administer at home. There are various personal light-therapy tools available. These include table-top light boxes that house several lighting tubes. They're popular because you only need to face the box, not look directly into the light, meaning you can do other activities during the session, like reading a book or working on a computer.

Alternatively, light visors, which are worn like a baseball cap, and lighted eyeglasses, which look like regular glasses but have small LED lights on the frames, are other options.

Besides light therapy, teens can improve their sleeping patterns with good sleep hygiene practices. **This involves developing healthy habits and sleep behaviors, such as:**

Maintaining a **regular sleep schedule** throughout the week.

Avoiding caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.

Establishing a **relaxing bedtime routine**, such as having a warm bath.

Exercising regularly.

Limiting computer and phone screen time before bed.

Creating a **sleep-friendly environment** in the bedroom, such as ensuring the room is dark and cool.

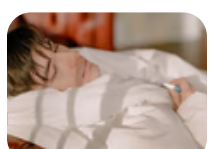
Preparing for the morning the night before to reduce stress.

Although sleeping difficulties are troublesome, it's possible to re-train the body's internal clock and improve sleep quality.

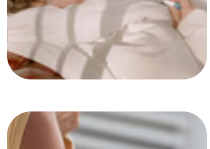
Sleep is critical for overall health and well-being, but it's something that many teenagers struggle with. However, bright-light therapy appears to be an effective treatment.

In addition, practicing good sleep hygiene and establishing a regular sleep schedule can help improve overall sleep quality. By making a few simple changes, teens can get the recommended 8 or more hours of restorative sleep.

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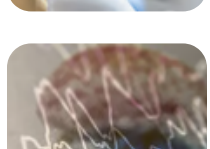
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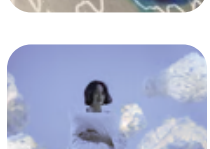
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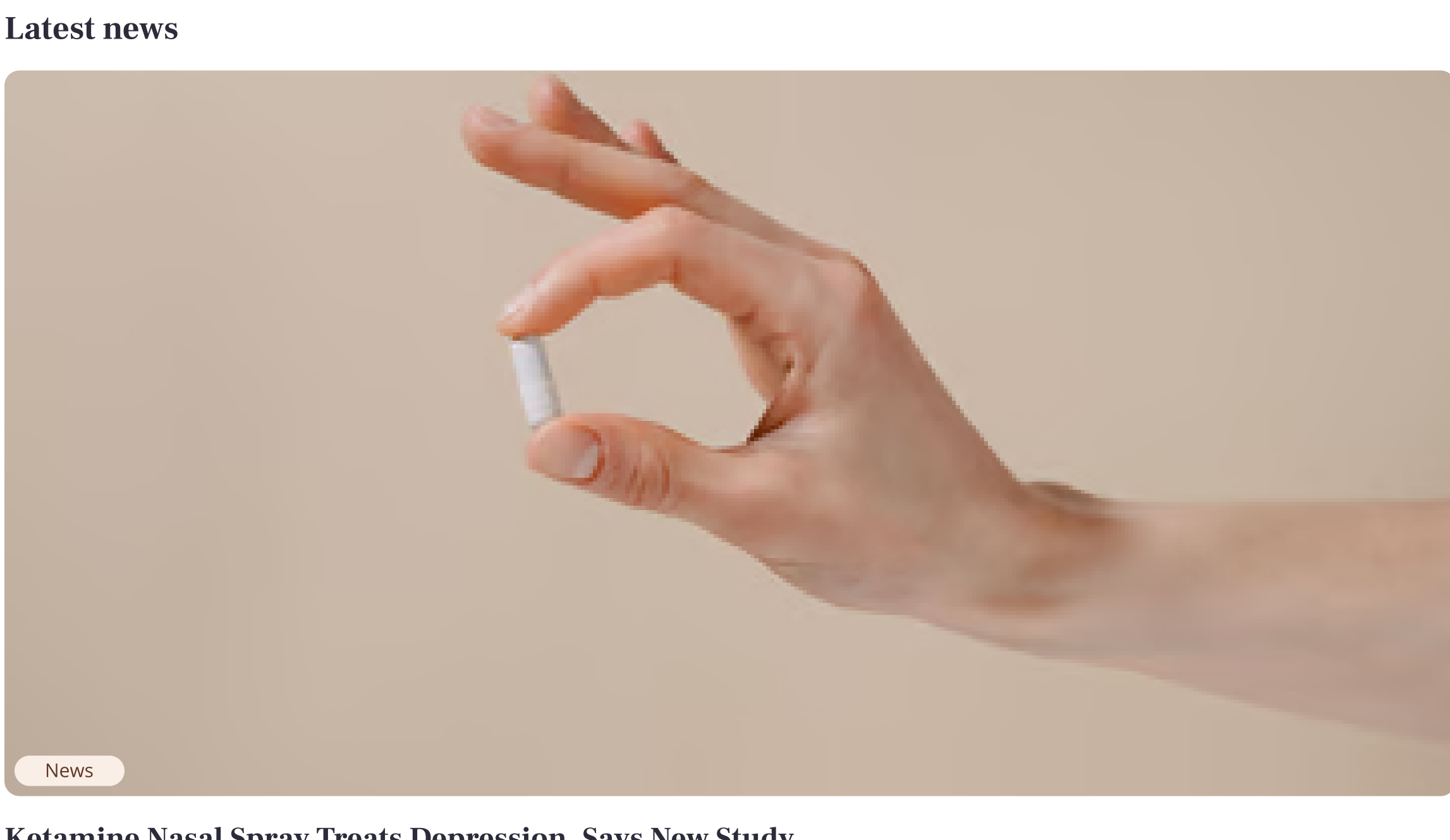


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