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patterns, but it's not easy," Shives says. Being a "morning" vs. "night" person is so ingrained in one's nature that Shives sometimes tells late-nighters to seek careers with delayed start times.

Sleep Phase Disorders

The reason Shives' job is so difficult might lie in our genes. Two sleep disorders -- advanced sleep phase syndrome, which causes bedtimes of between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., and delayed sleep phase, where patients fall asleep between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. -- are both often inherited. Advanced sleep phase is less common, affecting less than 1% of middle-aged and older adults. As for delayed sleep phase syndrome, researchers don't know how many people have it, but (to name one group of people) 7% to 16% of young adults do, according to the International Classification of Sleep Disorders.

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The greater incidence of delayed sleep phase may explain why night owls seek help more often than larks -- there are simply more of them. In addition, their shut-eye patterns frequently interrupt normal school or work schedules because their late bedtimes cause difficulty waking up at an appropriate hour.

Beyond genes, sleep patterns are influenced by a strong biological pull. The



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body's circadian rhythm dictates what time a person falls asleep and wakes up, and that can be very difficult to change. "Normally, I can help them a bit," Shives says. "If patients are going to bed at 4 in the morning, I'm not going to get them to 11 p.m. But I can roll them back to 1 or 2 a.m., and that generally makes them pretty happy."

And 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. is Cyphers' new [bedtime](#), too -- not optimal, but an improvement nonetheless. "I don't feel like I can take on the world every day, but I do feel better," he says.

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