

6B THREE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT SLEEP Student B

How our ancestors used to sleep

An American historian, Roger Ekirch, has done a lot of research (based mainly on literature and diaries) that shows that until the end of the 18th century humans used to sleep in two distinct periods, called "first sleep" and "second sleep."

First sleep began about two hours after nightfall and lasted for about four hours. It was followed by a period of between one or two hours when people were awake. During the waking period people were active. Most people stayed in bed reading, writing, or praying, etc., but others got up and even used the time to visit neighbors. They then went back to sleep for another four hours.

This research is backed up by an experiment done by a psychiatrist, Thomas Wehr, in the early 1990s, in which a group of people were left in total darkness for 14 hours every day for a month. By the fourth week, the people had begun to sleep in a very clear pattern. They slept first for four hours, and then woke for one or two hours before falling into a second four-hour sleep, in exactly the same way as people had slept in the 18th century. The research suggests that today's habit of sleeping seven to eight consecutive hours may not be the most natural way to sleep.