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How to light timers work

An electrical circuit with a built-in clock is known as a light timer. The timer acts as a link between the power source and the light, turning lights on and off according to your set times. These devices come in a variety of sizes and have controls ranging from circular dials to digital settings. Light timers can be standalone devices with a single electrical outlet, or they can be part of a more extensive system. Plug the timer into the wall outlet first, then the light into the timer for most timers. Switch on and leave the light on. The timer's circuit will turn on and off the light at times you specify. You're ready to go once you've defined the times. Lights aren't the only thing that a timer can control. Most rooms in your home will have one or more wall switches used to control lighting fixtures or electrical outlets. Our recessed fixtures, pendant lights, chandeliers, and wall sconces are usually turned off and on by flipping a wall switch, usually positioned near a doorway. In rooms without mounted light fixtures, that wall switch may control an electrical outlet where a floor lamp is plugged in. We don't usually give the switch itself much thought, but knowing something about how wall switches work and the different kinds of switches available is important if you want to make repairs or replacements to the system. There are only three kinds of wall switches that are used to control light fixtures: simple single-pole (ON/OFF) switch, three-way switches, and four-way switches. Each of these types come in different operating styles, including toggle, rocker, and push-button. They may also be available in dimmer-style switches that allow for variable control of a light fixture's illumination level. It's important to choose a switch that provides the function you need. A single-pole switch is one that just turns the lights OFF or ON from one wall location. For that reason, they're sometimes referred to as single-location switches. A single-pole switch is most easily identified by the ON/OFF markings printed on the switch toggle lever; no other type of switch has these markings. In technical terms, this simple ON/OFF switch is known as single-pole, single-throw (SPST) switch. Single-pole means that only one hot wire can be connected to it. Single-throw means that when you flip the level, it connects to only one other outgoing wire—the wire going to the light fixture or switched outlet. In single-pole switches, there is a spring-loaded metal gate inside the switch that opens and closes the electrical circuit leading to the light fixture. When you toggle the level to the ON position, the gate snaps closed, completes the circuit, and allows power to flow through the switch and onward to the light fixture. When you flip the toggle lever to the OFF position, the gateway opens up, interrupting the flow of power to the light fixture. There are different designs used for the inner gateway on switches. Older types are purely mechanical, with a metal arm controlled by springs. These types can wear out as the springs lose their resiliency. A type of switch developed in the 1960s used a vial of mercury inside to conduct electricity. These types do not have the characteristic "snap" when the lever is flipped, and they are considerably more durable than mechanical snap switches. Sometimes marketed as "quiet" switches, these are considerably more expensive, but they rarely wear out. These switches were phased out because of the risks associated with using mercury. Modern switches no longer have the old clicking sound, but they do operate more quietly than old click switches. A three-way switch is used when you want to control a light fixture from two wall locations, such as at the top and bottom of a stairway, both ends of a hallway, or from two entry doors in a large room. This switch does not have ON/OFF markings on its lever. In addition to a green grounding screw, three-way switches have three screw terminals that serve very different functions, depending on where the switch is located in the circuit configuration. One dark-colored screw terminal, called the common, is connected to a hot wire that either delivers power to the switch from the power source, or is connected to a hot wire that delivers power onward to the light fixture. The other two screw terminals are lighter in color (usually brass), and these connect to a pair of wires, called travelers, that run between the two switches. Internally, a three-way switch has a mechanical configuration shaped like a "V." The point of the V is the terminal where the hot wire coming from your service panel (the line wire), or leading onward to the light fixture (the load wire), is connected. The two traveler wires running between the two switches are connected to traveler screw terminals linked to the open arms on the V. This essentially means there are two possible pathways by which electricity can flow to the light fixture. When the runner terminals line up internally the light is on, but when they don't, the light is off. Whenever the levers are in different positions, no pathway exists and the light fixture remains dark. This configuration allows either of the wall switches to turn the light fixture ON or OFF at any time. In technical terms, a three-way switch is known as a single pole, double-throw (SPDT) switch. Single-pole, again, means that only one "hot" wire is connected to it. But this switch also has two other wires connected to it, and the term double-throw means that flipping the lever toggles the electrical pathway back and forth between the other two outgoing traveler wires that run between the two switches. A four-way switch is used when you want to control a light fixture from three or more locations. Many homes have no need for such a configuration, but a large home with a great room or a spacious open floor plan may find it useful to control a ceiling light from three or more locations. For example, a large ceiling chandelier can be controlled by one switch at the front entry, another at the passage door leading to the attached garage, and a third switch positioned at the end of the hallway leading to the bedrooms. Or, in a long hallway, it can be useful to control the hallway light from switches positioned near each bedroom door. A 4-way switch is used in conjunction with a pair of three-way switches—one located at the front end of the circuit where power is delivered from the source, and the second at the point where power runs onward to the light fixture. In between the two three-way switches is one or more four-way switches. Visually, a four-way switch can be identified by four screw terminals on the body of the switch (in addition to the green grounding screw). This means that two hot wires (or potentially hot) wires are connected to it from the power source—which in this case are the traveler wires arriving from the upstream switch in the circuit configuration. Understanding exactly how a four-way switch and two three-way switches work together to control a light fixture from all three locations can be tricky to visualize. Essentially, the four-way switch can be thought of as having an "X"-shaped inner mechanism that toggles the electrical pathway back and forth between the already established pathways between the two three-way switches. It can, therefore, reverse a pathway that is complete to interrupt the current flow (thereby turning the light fixture OFF), or reverse a pathway that is broken to complete the circuit (thereby turning the light fixture ON). In other words, a four-way switch serves to open a closed electrical pathway, or close an open pathway. If you want to replace one of your existing switches with a new switch, a timer switch, or a dimmer switch, the new control needs to have the same functionality as the switch it's replacing. That is, a single-pole wall switch requires a single-pole dimmer or timer, and a three-way wall switch requires a three-way dimmer or timer. However, four-way dimmers and timers are not currently available. In four-way switch configurations, you can replace one or both of the three-way switches with a dimmer or timer, but the four-way switch will need to remain a simple toggle switch. Second, it is important to remember that the power is never fully OFF in a switch circuit—unless you turn the power off at the circuit breaker. Just because a wall switch is flipped OFF and the light fixture not illuminated does not mean the wires are not carrying power. Best practice is to always turn off the circuit breaker, even if you are just replacing a light bulb or two. This will eliminate the possibility that someone might turn on the power to the fixture by flipping a wall switch. A light timer is a device that plugs into any electrical outlet and has a switched outlet on the side of the unit. The light timer has a 24-hour clock with the ability to be set to turn the power on and off to the switched outlet one or more times throughout the day (depending on the model). By plugging a lamp into the switched outlet, the timer can control when the lamp will turn on and off throughout the day. Such installations are commonly used when people go on vacation, to give the impression that someone is home. Rotate the dial on the front of the timer to indicate the current time. Since the timer is on a 24-hour rotation, ensure to rotate to the appropriate "AM" or "PM" setting. Push in the button on the dial that corresponds to the time you want the lamp to automatically turn on. Push the button on the dial that corresponds to the time you want the lamp to be turned off. Disconnect the lamp's electrical plug from the outlet. Insert the plug into the switched outlet on the timer. Plug the timer into the wall outlet. Turn on the lamp's light switch. If the current time falls between the desired on and off time on the timer, rotate the dial on the front of the timer until it clicks. The lamp should come on. Keep an eye on the lamp for the next 24 hours to ensure that the lamp is turning on and off at the desired time to verify that you have set the timer correctly. Things You Will Need

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