

Sleep And Technology: 10 Golden Rules



As many young adults now own a smartphone or tablet, there is a wealth of information at their fingertips and a limitless supply of social media messages, games, music and TV intruding into the sleep cycle.

Evidence suggests that social media and smartphones can have a negative impact on our health with increased smartphone use associated with poor sleep outcomes, and higher scores on depression and anxiety scales (Demirci, Akgonul & Akpinar, 2015).

As we snuggle up in the warmth of bed, our IT use can even promote the illusion of unwinding for bedtime as we play candy crush, check Facebook, listen to music or read. This can be a problem as circadian rhythms alter as young people mature, meaning they are inclined to sleep less, and our IT use can interfere with this process making healthy sleep patterns even harder to establish.

Although using IT might feel relaxing, we are still using our brain, eyes and hands to process information. The light itself from LED displays can even delay the release of melatonin, disrupting the natural sleep cycle and interfering with alertness and memory retention the following day (Oh, Yoo, Park & Do, 2015).

While it would be healthy to avoid use of smartphones and tablets prior to bed altogether, this is not always possible. Instead you can attempt to limit the impact

and excessive use of technology and adopt a healthier sleep routine. Below are ten handy tips that promote better sleep hygiene.

10 golden rules of 'sleep hygiene'.

1. Be consistent - Train your body to sleep by going to bed and getting up at the same time (even weekends). You can develop your own sleep rituals, such as stretches, breathing exercises, meditation, or sitting calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea.

2. Sleep when sleepy - Don't spend too much time lying awake in bed, only go to bed when you feel tired.

3. Get up and try again - If you haven't fallen asleep within half an hour, get up and do something calm until you feel sleepy. Sit with the lights dimmed and read something boring (preferably in print not on a screen), or if you use your tech, reduce the noise and 100% brightness. Try to avoid anything overly interesting or stimulating; as this could wake you up even more.

4. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol - It is best to avoid consuming these substances at least 4-6 hours before bed. They can act as stimulants and that late night snack, smoke or drink can keep you awake and disturb the quality of your sleep.

5. Bed is for sleeping - Only use your bed for what it's intended, so your body associates bed with sleep. If you watch TV, eat, read, or work on your laptop, your body may not learn this connection. Leave your phone outside the bedroom too, or if you must have your phone- ensure you go to bed when you are sleepy and avoid phone use in bed.

6. No naps - Avoid naps during the day to ensure you are tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day, ensure your nap is for less than an hour and before 3pm.

7. Bath time - Having a bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can help. The bath raises your body temperature, and you begin to feel sleepy as your temperature drops.

8. No clock-watching, or phone checking - It's natural, but try not to watch the clock. Checking the time wakes you up and reinforces negative thoughts such as 'oh no it's so late, I'll never get to sleep'. A good practice is to turn your phone onto sleep mode at night so that notifications do not disturb you as you're falling asleep.

9. Use a sleep diary or app - This is a valuable way to track your sleep patterns. If you have sleeping difficulties, a GP or psychologist can use this information.

10. Exercise - Regular exercise is also good when it comes to sleep. Burning energy during the day can help to ensure you don't feel restless in the evening. Try not to do strenuous exercise in the 4 hours before bedtime.

Final Tip: Lead by example and reduce your own bedtime IT use!

Source: <http://www.generationnext.com.au/2016/06/sleep-and-technology/>