

## May Wellness: What's All the Hype Around Blue Light?

By Ashley J. Sicilia



**You may have heard people talking about blue light, that it affects your health and you should try to limit your exposure to it when possible. But what is it and why?** In short, blue light is made up of more energy than any other light on the color spectrum. It can affect your wellbeing if you are exposed to too much of it at the wrong time of day.<sup>1</sup>

**According to Harvard Health, blue light can alter your sleep patterns and by doing so, can potentially cause health issues.** Let's pause and think about a few reasons why we need to be mindful of our sleep. Sleep helps our bodies heal. Sleep improves brain health and keeps us focused during the day after a restful night. Sleep allows our bodies to maintain a solid defense system keeping us immune to disease and infection. Sleep clears out toxic byproducts that naturally accumulate in your brain and throughout your body during the day. Sleep puts our cellular regeneration process in turbo drive. You get the idea.<sup>2</sup>

**So, now that I've convinced you that you absolutely need enough sleep to keep healthy, let's get back to blue light.** Blue light is not the devil. We actually need it to keep our sleep cycle in check, which is one of many circadian rhythms within our bodies. According to the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, circadian rhythms are changes within the body that follow a daily cycle — such as being awake and going to sleep based on melatonin production in our bodies — which is influenced by light.<sup>3</sup>

Again, blue light is made up of more energy than any other light on the color spectrum. Our increasing digital world exposes us to more blue light, from watching TV, cell phone use, using energy efficient lights within our homes (LED), to even being blinded on the turnpike with massive digital billboards. At night, our bodies should be winding down. But blue light - more energy - keeps our bodies awake, making it difficult to relax and go to sleep.

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**Are you prone to insomnia? Harvard researchers say red light has the least amount of disruption to our body's natural production of melatonin, the sleep hormone.** The Better Sleep Council says that reddish or orange lights are least likely to interfere with sleep because of their low levels of energy. If you're having difficulty sleeping at night, try using red night lights in order to prevent disruption in your sleep rhythm. That way, if you're up and wandering about aimlessly throughout your home, you'll be able to see but your body won't think it's daytime. <sup>4</sup>

**Can't break the phone habit? If you have an iPhone, try using the Night Shift feature.** This will tint your screen to a warmer color, limiting your exposure to blue light. Just go to Settings, Display & Brightness, Night Shift. You can schedule a time for Night Shift to turn on automatically and adjust color temperature. If you're not an iPhone user, there are plenty of free apps that offer this same feature.

**Many of us, are just purely addicted to our phones. Some of us have a terrible habit of staying on our phones when we should be sleeping. Join us in our May wellness challenge: Let's limit our exposure to blue light. To do this, use Apple's Night Shift feature or download an app compatible with your phone that will tint the screen a warm color after dark. Let's see who's up to the challenge!**

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> Stringham, James M., Nicole T. Stringham and Kevin J. O'Brien. "Macular Carotenoid Supplementation Improves Visual Performance, Sleep Quality, and Adverse Physical Symptoms in Those with High Screen Time Exposure." 2017. US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health. <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5532554/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Blue light has a dark side. n.d. <<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/blue-light-has-a-dark-side>>.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of General Medical Sciences. n.d. <[https://www.nigms.nih.gov/education/pages/factsheet\\_circadianrhythms.aspx](https://www.nigms.nih.gov/education/pages/factsheet_circadianrhythms.aspx)>.

<sup>4</sup> The Negative Effects of Using LED and Blue Lights at Night . n.d. <<https://bettersleep.org/blog/the-negative-effects-of-using-led-and-blue-lights-at-night/>>.