Article:

Content Type	MedCline Blog
Target Keywords	Screen time before bed Electronics and sleep
URL Slug:	electronics-and-sleep-best-practices
Meta Title	Managing Electronics for Better Sleep: Strategies and Best Practices
Meta Description	Learn how to balance technology use with good sleep hygiene. Get our best practices for managing electronics before bed to improve your sleep quality.
Grammarly Score	97
Plagiarism Checker	No plagiarism found
Hemingway Score	Grade 8
Copyscape	No plagiarism found
Word Count	1702
Internal links (1-2)	7 links
External links (1-2)	15 links
First sentence	Screen time before bed

Navigating Screen Time Before Bed: Best Practices

Screen time before bed can be detrimental to a good night's sleep. In particular, our electronics emit blue light, which disrupts our natural sleep-wake cycle. And while technology has made our lives easier and better in many ways, it also adds extra pressure to constantly be online and available - even right before we go to sleep.

But how bad is it to use our devices before bed, and in what ways does it impact our sleep quality? And what can be done to create more boundaries around our electronics and sleep? We explore the answers to these questions and more below.

Understanding the Impact of Electronics on Sleep

Blue light from screens can affect sleep negatively in a couple of ways.

First, blue light disrupts your sleep-wake cycle. Research shows blue light impacts your circadian rhythm more than any other light. It also reduces your levels of melatonin—the hormone that controls your sleep-wake cycle. In one study, Harvard researchers compared the exposure of 6.5 hours of blue light to that of comparable green light. They found that the blue light shifted circadian rhythms by three hours compared to the one-and-a-half hours of green light. Blue light also suppressed melatonin for twice as long.

Blue light can also overstimulate your brain before bed. In the moments before we sleep, our brains should have a chance to wind down from the day's activities. Bringing electronics into our bedtime routine can have the opposite effect. For instance, doomscrolling or replying to an email about a work project can keep your brain alert, making it harder to fall asleep. Similarly, reading a disturbing news story or receiving a heated message before bed can upset you. And as studies have shown, stress and anxiety are two primary factors for poor sleep quality.

Best Practices for Electronics Usage Before Bed

One of the best ways to reduce screen time before bed is to simply turn off your devices. To keep this a habit every night, set an alarm and stick to a digital curfew. Sleep experts recommend having at least an hour or two of screen-free time before bed. If you have to use your electronics after the sun goes down, here are some best practices to follow before bed:

- **Dim the brightness.** Using night mode on your smartphone and computer can help minimize blue light exposure and improve sleep quality.
- **Wear special glasses.** Blue light-blocking glasses can minimize the effects of bright light on suppressing melatonin.

- **Use an app.** Several apps, like f.lux for PC or Night Shift on iOS, can reduce blue light by displaying a warmer spectrum instead.

Alternative Nighttime Activities

Swapping screen time before bed for relaxing activities is a great way to unwind and de-stress. Establishing a calming pre-sleep routine can also improve sleep quality. By setting healthy habits and doing the same thing every night, your brain will recognize when it's time to go to bed.

Here are some ideas and sleep hygiene tips to get you started.

- **Curl up with a good book.** Studies show that reading before bed can help lower your stimulation and cause your brain to "destimulate."
- **Journal**. Writing down all your thoughts and feelings from the day can clear your mind before bed.
- **Meditate.** Meditation can also quiet the mind and cultivate calmness.
- **Take a warm bath.** A soak before bed can help you relax. Research also shows it lowers your core temperature, signaling your circadian rhythm that it's time to sleep.
- **Practice gentle yoga.** Light stretching and yin yoga can help release tension in your body.
- **Listen to a soothing playlist.** Calming music is another way to improve sleep hygiene and prepare for bed. Research even shows that it can enhance sleep quality.
- **Engage in aromatherapy.** Diffusing essential oils like lavender and chamomile can create a relaxing sleeping environment.

Setting Up a Sleep-Conducive Environment

Designating your bedroom (or an area of your bedroom) as a device-free zone is one way to create a healthy balance between electronics and sleep. Here are a few ideas:

- **Create a check-in spot.** Set up a space outside your bedroom or away from your bed to "check in" your technology for the night.
- **Determine "screen off" times.** As mentioned above, set a time to power down each day and put your screens on night mode. This is also a great way to set boundaries. When you

don't have your phone next to you, you'll feel less likely to be available 24/7 to friends, family, and co-workers.

- **Use a simple alarm clock.** If you need help waking up on time, replace your phone with a basic alarm clock or a sunrise alarm.

Additional bedroom optimization

The right sleep environment can enhance sleep quality and quantity while minimizing screen time before bed. Here's how to optimize your bedroom for sleep.

- **Arrange your bedroom and furniture to keep things clutter-free and calm.** Position your bed against the wall with a clear view of the door to create a sense of security. Utilize your vertical space to maximize floor space and clear the path from your bed to the bathroom if you have to get up at night.
- **Invest in a quality mattress and choose comfortable bedding.** Both your bed and bed linens should suit your sleeping preferences. Pillows matter, too. If you sleep hot, a cooling pillow like MedCline's Cooling Body Pillow provides breathability and air circulation with its shredded memory foam filling. For sleepers who snore, have acid reflux, sleep apnea, or chronic joint pain, an elevated pillow can offer relief in the doctor-recommended side position. Unlike other sleep wedges, MedCline's sleep solutions offer a patented arm pocket to keep the weight and pressure off your downed arm.
- **Block out bothersome sounds that could disrupt your sleep.** Hang noise-blocking curtains or play a white noise machine to drown out external noises. Tranquil music and ambient sounds can also mask the noise while relieving stress and anxiety while you sleep.
- **Keep your bedroom cool and humidity levels low.** Sleep experts recommend a range of 60 to 67 degrees to match the natural drop in body temperature as you sleep. The Environmental Protection Agency also suggests that humidity levels be under 60%, ideally between 30% and 50%.
- **Add visual and aesthetic design elements to promote calmness.** Soft, warm colors are often a versatile choice. Certain hues like blue and green can also create a sense of peace.

Handling Exceptions and Practical Challenges

Workers on the night shift and students who have to study late may not be able to put away their devices at night. Here are some tips for using a blue light later in the evening.

- **Adjust your screen's settings and brightness.** If your device has "night shift" or "night mode," switch to that setting to adjust the screen color temperature and reduce blue light emission. Lowering your screen brightness levels can also reduce light exposure and make it easier on your eyes.
- **Schedule breaks.** Take frequent breaks from screens throughout your workday or study session if you have to work late into the night. Get up, move around, and look at something in the distance to minimize eye strain.
- **Reduce your caffeine intake.** Since caffeine disrupts sleep, avoid drinking it later in your study or work shift.
- **Stay hydrated**. Drink plenty of water throughout the day and while you study or work, as dehydration can worsen sleep quality.

Gradual reduction strategies

For others, giving up electronics at night can be a challenge. Here are some gradual reduction strategies to slowly decrease screen time before bed.

- **Start small.** Instead of going cold turkey, try to reduce screen time by 15-30 minutes a night for the first week. These small wins will build momentum and make the process less daunting.
- **Silence notifications.** Turn off your notifications during your wind-down routine to avoid the temptation to check your phone.
- **Communicate your goals.** Tell your friends, family, and co-workers about your screen-free schedule to get support and minimize distractions.
- **Use positive reinforcement to celebrate your progress.** Once you reach your screen-free time goal, reward yourself with an enjoyable activity. Buy a new book, take a longer bath, or make yourself a delicious (caffeine-free) beverage.

Children and Electronics

Numerous studies suggest that children are particularly susceptible to screen time before bed. Using electronics before bed can cause young people to take more time to fall asleep. It can also cause children to sleep less and have poorer sleep quality. To combat this, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends devices not be allowed in children's bedrooms and turned off at least 30 minutes before going to bed.

Other strategies for managing electronics and your child's sleep include the following:

- **Modify content intake.** Choose age-appropriate activities, games, and shows on your children's devices that promote calmness before bed.
- **Monitor activity.** Use built-in features or parental control apps to set time limits for specific apps and categories or restrict certain content.
- **Set clear boundaries**. Create a consistent bedtime routine for your children and lead by example. If your children see you power down before bed, they'll likely get on board and follow suit.

Conclusion

Consistent sleep hygiene practices and minimizing blue light exposure in the evening are crucial for a good night's sleep and overall health. By making small changes, you can significantly improve your sleep quality and wake up feeling refreshed and energized.

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Investing in a medically proven pillow is one easy way to improve your sleep quality, especially if you suffer from a medical condition, sleep disorder, or shoulder pain at night. At MedCline, our sleep wedges are backed by science and provide safe, non-medication solutions. Made with adjustable memory foam stuffing, our seamless design features full-body support to align your spine and elevate your upper body.

For more information about how our snoring solutions can help with childhood snoring, check out our MedCline FAQs or speak with one of our Sleep Specialists today!

Resources

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