

New Studies on Device Use and Sleep Quality

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The use of devices before going to bed – be it watching shows in bed or scrolling through social media feeds – has conventionally been viewed as a bad thing; a habit that’s said to have adverse effects in one’s quality of sleep.

Two recent studies on the matter, however, surprisingly reveal that this is not stringently so, with one saying that some may even sleep better if they watch something for a short while before turning in.

Here are the key findings of the studies, one which centered on pre-bedtime social media use and another which looked into the effects of taking in entertainment-oriented content before sleeping.

- 30 minutes of pre-bedtime social media use. In a recent sleep-lab study with 32 young volunteers, a team of researchers found that pre-sleep social media use had “little effect on bedtime arousal and sleep quality than what was previously expected.”

The study – titled “Pre-sleep social media use does not strongly disturb sleep: a sleep laboratory study in healthy young participants” and published in the *Sleep Medicine* journal – was done by testing for the effects of 30 minutes of social media use before sleeping, then compared its progressive muscle relaxation or PMR findings with natural sleep data taken from a within-subject design.

The within-subject design entailed an adaptation night that was meant to get its subjects used to sleeping with electroencephalography or EEG electrodes attached on their heads, three nights which served as “neutral condition” nights, relaxation experiments wherein subjects were exposed to muscle relaxation audio and the 30-minute social media experiment.

It was found that using social media 30 minutes before going to sleep didn’t have any effect on measures of sleep quality compared to natural sleep data, but the study’s proponents did control for the effects of blue light in its experiments.

- Watching shows before bedtime. In another study, titled “The complicated impact of media use before bed on sleep,” a team of researchers looked into how access to entertainment-oriented content before sleeping had an effect in the overall quality of sleep.

Published in the *Journal of Sleep Research*, the study worked with 58 adult subjects in assessing how watching a show, listening to music or a podcast, multitasking with one’s phone and/or a combination of the activities has an effect in sleep quality. They found that sleep quality was not affected by media consumption one hour before going to sleep, and that there were even indicators of improved sleep quality in some of its respondents who did.

The study’s proponents, however, stress that the improved slumber data (which was collected using EEG technology) was taken from subjects who watched a show or listened to a podcast without multitasking like scrolling on social media or replying to DMs.

In other words, the subjects who focused on the media they were consuming and weren’t distracted by doing other things on their phones slept better. Also, the subjects who slept better watched/listened to shows at limited durations and not for an extended period of time.