- Sun / Phototherapy

# HEALTH

## FOR BETTER SLEEP, HEAD OUTSIDE AFTER WAKING

Blue-enriched light can improve sleep quality and daily activity in older adults living at home, according to new research out of the University of Surrey. Researchers found that this type of light therapy led to greater daytime activity, earlier bedtimes, regular sleep patterns and improved sleep quality, offering a promising, non-pharmacological approach to address age-related sleep challenges.

As people age, their sleep patterns often change, leading to difficulties falling asleep, waking up earlier, more frequent nighttime awakenings, and overall poorer sleep quality. These changes are linked to age-related changes in the eyes and reduced exposure to daylight, often due to decreased mobility and social interactions, alongside increased exposure to artificial light at night. Also hormonal changes, such as alterations in oestrogen and progesterone, can lead to disrupted sleep.

Blue light, like other colours of visible light, is all around you. The sun emits blue light. So do fluorescent and incandescent light bulbs. Human beings are exposed to more blue light than ever because of the widespread use of devices that rely on light-emitting diode (LED) technology such as smart phones, flat screen televisions and tablets.

The study, published in *GeroScience*, investigated the effects of different light conditions on adults aged 60 and over. Researchers carefully monitored sleep patterns and activity levels using wearable technology and sleep diaries.

The study found that the timing of light is crucial. They found that blue-enriched light is only beneficial in the morning, while exposure in the evening makes it more difficult to fall asleep and causes more restless nights.

An earlier study by the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Arizona found that 30 minutes of blue light exposure within 2 hours of waking and no later than 11am improved sleep quality, with less disrupted sleep and lower levels of insomnia.

Want to boost your morning blue light exposure? Go outside as soon as you can after the sun has come up. If you are unable to go outside each morning, or if you live in an location that receives little daylight, light therapy boxes are designed to mimic outdoor light and may help, but talk to your healthcare practitioner first. And don't forget it's all about timing, so it's ideal to avoid as much blue light as possible after the sun sets.



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