

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Bedroom Televisions and Sleep

How much sleep did you get last night? If you're like most people (yawn ...), it probably wasn't sufficient. But some surprising new research might help you catch those elusive ZZZ's. If counting sheep and drinking warm milk aren't working, studies suggest taking the TV out of the bedroom just might do the trick.

Lack of sleep is often linked to an unhealthy lifestyle and poor health status (BMC Public Health 2006;6:59). That's because the body does the majority of its "repair" work overnight. When this process is shortchanged, physical vulnerabilities result.

Dr. Smith believes a good night's sleep is an integral part of the chiropractic lifestyle: a philosophy that focuses on preventing disease before it occurs.

One of the greatest contributors to sleeplessness — in addition to stress, work demands and family pressure — is television: particularly when the set is located in the bedroom.

To learn more about a bedroom television's impact on insomnia and other health issues, and why Dr. Smith is so concerned about its short- and long-term complications, take a moment to read this month's *Optimal Health University*® handout.

The Glow in the Dark

A nightlight can keep you from stubbing your toe in the dark. But the "night light" from a television screen can spark restless nights that jeopardize the immune system and cause daytime drowsiness.

In one study researchers noted the negative effect of ambient (surrounding) environmental lighting on sleep/wake patterns. The study included 17 patients with wrist-worn and free-standing light meters. Light sources included "soft glow" wall-mounted fixtures behind the beds.

The study explains that "disrupted

sleep in hospitalized patients is widely reported, and ambient environmental lighting may be both a contributor to and a modifier of sleep/wake patterns." (*Res Nurs Health* 2007;30:120-8.)

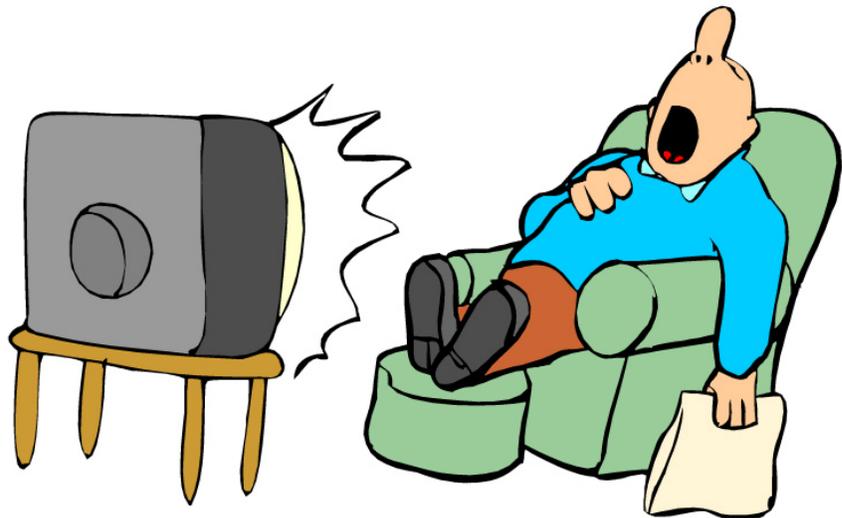
Breast Cancer Link

Animal studies also link nighttime exposure to artificial light with the growth of breast tumors. The theory, according to an article published in the peer-reviewed medical journal *Cancer*

Research is that light suppresses melatonin levels. Extended periods of nighttime darkness, however, boosted this key hormone's levels and substantially slowed tumor growth.

In another survey of 100 women who suffered from breast cancer and 100 healthy women, researchers detected a significance difference between the group of cancer patients and the healthy group in their proximity to large shopping centers, malls, and entertainment areas. These places generally make use of "blue" lighting, a type of ambient lighting, that, while more intense than light from a television, may be related to it.

Researcher Itai Kloog of the University of Haifa in Israel explained, "The body produces the hormone melatonin at night, when it is dark. This hormone delays the growth of cancerous cells. Therefore, any reduction of this hormone in the blood as a result of exposure to artificial lighting constitutes another factor putting women at risk of falling ill with breast cancer."



Steven L. Smith, DC, Hickory Chiropractic Clinic, PLLC
256 Third Avenue NW, Hickory, NC 28601 (828) 323-8998
www.hickorychiro.com contact@hickorychiro.com

The University of Haifa researcher warns against artificial light trickling into the bedroom all night from outside. He advises shutting unnecessary house lights at night and to be careful not to fall asleep in front of a television that is left on. Deserted areas of the city, like an industrial area, should be blacked out at night, he feels.

That's why it's important to block out as much ambient light as possible — not only from glaring television screens but illuminated clocks and, in children's bedrooms, glow-in-the-dark ceiling decorations. According to a study published in the *European Journal of Cancer Prevention*, blocking out the light “may prevent the suppression of melatonin, which could help to prevent cancer.”

TVs in Children's Bedrooms

It's no surprise that children need more sleep — quality, uninterrupted ZZZZ's — than adults. But just how much is enough? Many experts suggest the following:

- 0 to 2 months: 15 to 18 hours
- 2 to 12 months: 14 to 15 hours
- 1 to 3 years: 12 to 14 hours
- 3 to 5 years: 11 to 13 hours
- 5 to 12 years: 10 to 11 hours

These recommendations, unfortunately, are largely unheeded.

According to a German study, “lack of sleep in children has been associated with a diminished school performance, reduced attention span, and obesity.” (*Gesundheitswesen* 2007;69:151-7.)

Of the 1,933 children who participated in the study, 28 percent reported going to bed after 9 p.m. on weeknights and 16 percent reported watching television more than three hours per day.

Don't Use TV as a Sleep Aid

In Belgium, a survey of 2,546 youngsters (ages 12 to 15) revealed that 36.7 percent reported watching television to help them fall asleep. In addition,

60.2 percent of the adolescents also used music. “Using [electronic] media as a sleep aid is negatively related to respondents' time to bed on weekdays, their number of hours of sleep per week and their self-reported level of tiredness.” (*J Paediatr Child Health* 2006;42:428-33.)

TV Affects Slumber Quality

Researchers in Finland looked at the effects of various forms of TV exposure on the quality of children's sleep.

“Both active TV viewing and passive TV exposure were related to sleeping difficulties, especially sleep-wake transition disorders and overall sleep disturbances. Particularly, passive TV exposure and viewing adult-targeted TV programs were strongly related to sleep disturbances.” (*J Sleep Res* 2006;15:154-61.)

In China, the parents of 19,299 elementary-school children completed surveys detailing their children's sleep patterns. The results indicated that televisions were present in the bedrooms of 18.5 percent of youngsters. “Overall, the most affected sleep behaviors were bedtime and awakening time on the weekends, the duration of sleep during the weekdays, and sleep disorders of bedtime resistance and sleep anxiety.” (*Sleep* 2007;30:361-7.)

Additional Negative Effects of a Bedroom TV

A television in the bedroom affects more than just your sleep. Read on for more reasons to keep your bedroom a TV-free zone.

Sound Barrier

Televisions in the bedroom do more than just keep you awake. They can also form a sound barrier that keeps you from hearing an intruder or the cries of a sick child in the middle of the night.

Intimacy Inhibitor

Late-night programming may be enlightening and entertaining, but numerous studies show that a television

in the bedroom inhibits communication and intimacy among couples. This, in turn, can create marital stress and strain: both of which are linked to disease.

Smoking

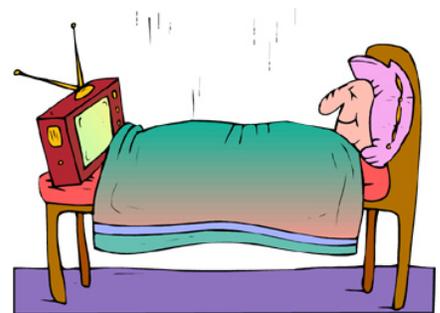
At the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Chapel Hill Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, researchers investigated a group of 735 youngsters (ages 12 to 14) to determine television's impact on smoking behavior.

Surprisingly, private access to television during early adolescence — indicated by having a bedroom television — was a significant predictor of smoking initiation (*Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med* 2007;161:260-8).

Sweet Dreams

Sleep is simply too important to let anything compromise its remarkably restorative powers.

If you suffer from sleep disturbances, try giving your bedroom television the boot. And, make sure to schedule an appointment for a chiropractic evaluation focused on uncovering any other “hidden” causes of your insomnia.



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