

Sweet dreams

Turning off technology might be the solution for sleep problems

BY CHANDRA ORR
 CREATORS NEWS SERVICE

Want to get more sleep? Tune out the technology. That's right — turn off your smart phone, power down the computer and skip the sensationalist news programs. Technology is one of the biggest barriers to a full night's rest.

The bright lights inhibit melatonin secretion, which tells your body that it's time to sleep. Late-night activities that actively engage the mind, like checking email, playing video games, text messaging and watching television, also make it difficult to relax and transition into sleep mode. Plus, it's easy to lose track of time and stay up later than you intended.

"Anthropologists tell us that 5,000 years ago, the average night sleep was 11-12 hours a night. When the sun went down, it was dark, boring and dangerous outside, so people went to bed," says [Jacob Teitelbaum](#), medical director of the national Fibromyalgia

and Fatigue Centers Inc. and author of "From Fatigued to Fantastic!" (\$16, Avery).

"The use of candles initially shortened our sleep time. Then light bulbs were developed, followed by radio, TV and computers. We are now down to an average of 6½ to 7 hours of sleep a night, and this is simply not adequate to allow proper tissue repair," he says.

"Sleep is important for a number of things, and we're still learning. It helps with areas such as brain development, consolidation of memories and enhancement of learning," says Shelby Freedman Harris, a top behavioral therapist with the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City.

A good night's sleep starts with a proper winding down period. Allow at least one hour of relaxation time before bed to give your body a chance to calm down and let your mind drift from the worries of the day.

"Winding down is an

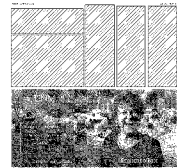
important part of sleep hygiene," Harris says.

"Creating a buffer period — or a protected period of time between a very stimulating or busy day and bedtime — is helpful to calm down the mind and body, to relax and not bring the daytime to-dos and worries to bed with you. It starts signaling to your body that it is time to go to sleep."

Dim the lights, turn off the cellphone, power down the computer and immerse yourself in a calm, relaxing activity. Read a book, practice deep breathing and relaxation exercises or take up a tranquil hobby like knitting or crochet.

If you must have the television on, skip the evening news, prime time dramas and horror movies that get your adrenaline flowing and make it harder to fall asleep. Opt for a light-hearted comedy or educational documentary instead.

Be consistent. Establish a regular bedtime and waking time, and stick to it.





CREATORS NEWS SERVICE

Something as simple as turning off your TV or cellphone can promote a good night's sleep.