



# To surf or to sleep? That is the question.

Taking your mobile phone, tablet or computer to bed is a bad idea if you want a good night's sleep. **TEXT** KIM E. ANDREASSEN

**W**hether you read emails, check how many Facebook likes you've got or just surf the internet randomly at bedtime, this may impair sleep, according to a sleep study done by researchers at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen (UiB).

In the study, more than 500 students answered questions about their online media habits at bedtime. More than 90 per cent admitted to web surfing, watching movies or emailing at least once a week in bed before going to sleep.

"Our sleep study shows a clear connection between web surfing and insomnia, i.e. sleep problems," says Professor Ståle Pallesen at UiB's Faculty of Psychology. He is a member of the Bergen Group for Treatment Research at UiB.

Pallesen is co-author of a paper on the study, called "The association between use of electronic media in bed before going to sleep and insomnia symptoms, daytime sleepiness, morningness, and chronotype." This was published in the journal *Behavioral Sleep Medicine* in October 2013.

## Late risers stay online more

As well as being associated with insomnia, the study showed that use of online media at bedtime seems to influence other aspects of the human sleep pattern. Late risers surfed the web more and watched more movies online than early birds. People with

delayed circadian rhythms spent more of their time in bed on social media compared to those with a more advanced circadian rhythm.

Although the researchers spotted a connection between use of digital media and sleep deprivation, as yet they do not have a final answer as to what causes this. But they believe that previous observations and studies do provide some suggestions.

"We know that evening light affects the biological mechanisms that delay sleep and the circadian rhythm. In addition, computer games or television shows can generate excitement and make sleep more difficult," Pallesen says.

"It can, however, not be ruled out that insomnia and delays in sleep patterns lead to people lying awake for longer at bedtime, thus resorting to electronic media for entertainment."

## Reserve the bed for sleep and sex

Electronic devices in the bedroom serve as distractions and make it harder to sleep, according to Pallesen and his fellow researchers. He mentions accidents as a theoretical parallel, where people may relive incidents because they encounter certain emotions upon revisiting the scene of an accident.

So what to do to avoid distractions and focus on quality sleep?

"People with insomnia issues are recommended to keep the bedroom free of television sets, mobile

phones, games consoles, computers and other electronic devices, says Professor Ståle Pallesen, before pointing out that the bed basically has two main uses. "The bedroom should be reserved for sex and sleep." ●

## FACTS

### The Bergen Group for Treatment Research

- The group's research belongs to the Faculty of Psychology's main research area of health, with a focus on mental health.
- Research covering aspects of aetiology, diagnostics and treatment, and also epidemiology, are part of the group's approach to mental health.
- The group's main focus topics are research on anxiety and sleep disorders.
- There is also research on health-psychological topics, mainly dealing with consequences of somatic diseases and problems related to addiction and gambling.
- The research is mainly of a quantitative approach.
- For more information, visit: [uib.no/rg/btr](http://uib.no/rg/btr)



Professor Ståle Pallesen, Department of Psychosocial Science, Faculty of Psychology, UiB. PHOTO: KIM E. ANDREASSEN