

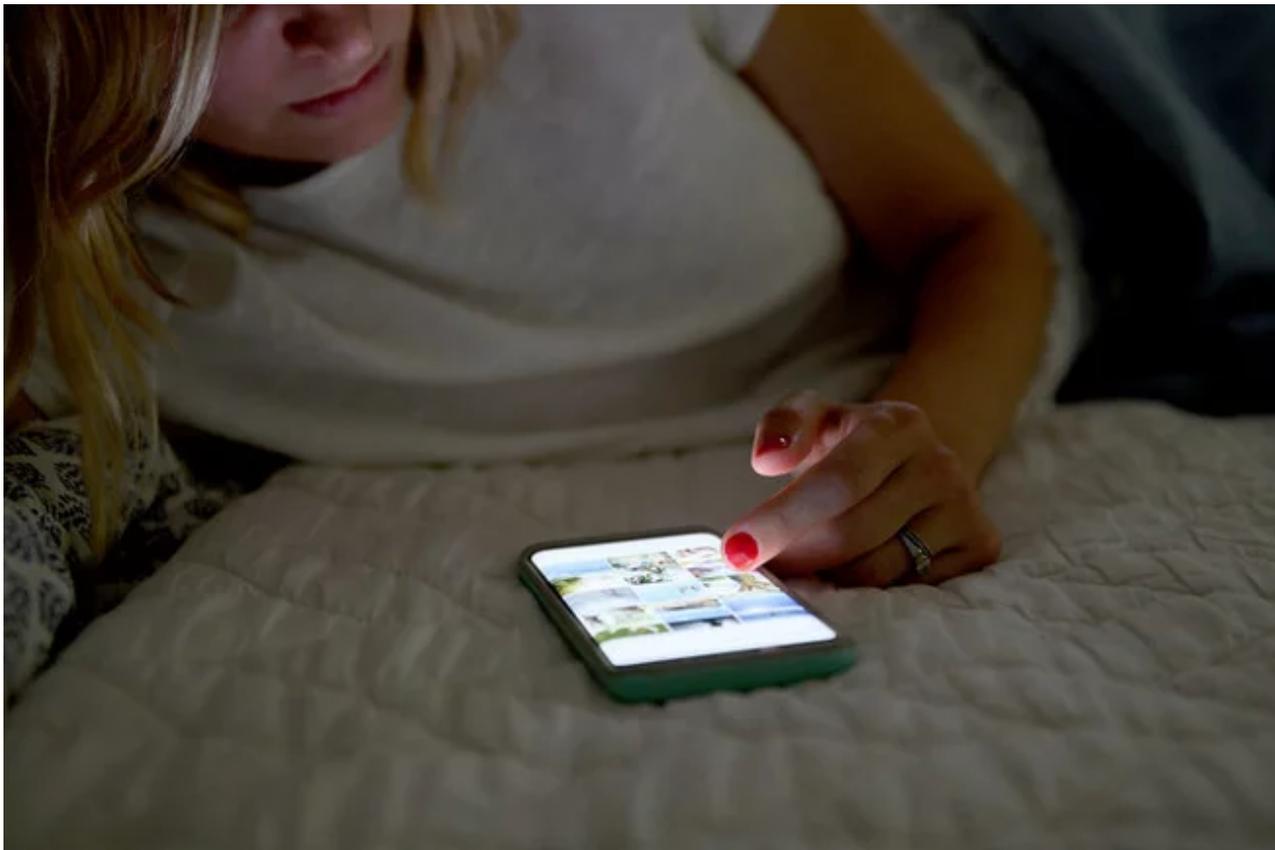
What Is Blue Light — and How Bad Is It Really?

Plus, the best blue-light-blocking glasses.

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Whether or not you know what blue light actually is, you probably know that it has a bit of a reputation — and it's not a great one. But you probably don't know that there are some surprising blue light benefits. (That's right, it's not inherently evil.)

Read on for everything you need to know about blue light, including what it actually is, how to keep your exposure in check, and the best blue light blocking

glasses to try.

VIDEO: The Costly Effects of Sleep Deprivation

What Is Blue Light?

There's a good chance you've heard of blue light in the context of screen time, but this little tidbit might surprise you: The main source of blue light in your day-to-day life is sunlight, says Nate Favini, M.D., the medical lead at Forward, a preventive primary care service. "Blue light is part of the normal spectrum of visible light," he explains.

More specifically, blue light is a short wavelength, high-frequency light that is known as high energy visible (HEV) light, says Mohan Dutt, M.D., a sleep specialist at Michigan Medicine's Sleep Disorders Centers and a host of the White Noise Podcast.

And although blue light is naturally occurring, it can also come from any number of man-made sources, including your laptop or phone screens, and LED lights (found in LED light bulbs or even an at-home acne mask).

How Does Blue Light Affect My Health?

Ready for this plot twist? Blue light is actually good for your health, Dr. Favini reports.

"Blue light exposure in the daytime boosts your mood and attention," he says. "It's necessary for your body's circadian rhythm, and reductions in blue light during the winter may contribute to seasonal affective disorder."

RELATED: 6 Things You Need to Know About Seasonal Affective Disorder

It's true: One of the most common treatments for seasonal affective disorder (SAD) — or "the winter blues" — is light therapy, which simulates sunlight and increases serotonin in the brain. Light therapy lamps (many of which rely on

blue light) emit light that is about 20 times greater than ordinary indoor lighting, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIH).

And blue light might even have some other surprising health benefits. One 2018 study found that participants exposed to a blue light lamp saw a significant improvement in blood pressure and overall circulation.

That all sounds like a good reason to give blue light the green light, right? (See what we did there?) The problem, however, is not so much blue light on its own, but "being exposed to large amounts of blue light at times when your body isn't expecting it," Dr. Favini says.

Once the sun goes down, your body is being cued to begin producing melatonin. The process typically starts two hours prior to bedtime, and it's when your melatonin levels peak that you are most likely to fall asleep, Dr. Dutt says. But when you add light into the mix, it causes a disruption in your natural circadian cycle, meaning you might not be able to fall asleep until "hours after the source of light has been shut off," he explains.

Basically, it's like trying to fall asleep with the sun shining through your blinds, but instead of the sun, it's your phone's screen as you scroll through Instagram.

RELATED: 5 Ways to Go the F— to Sleep

By the way, it's not just your sleep that blue light impacts, according to Dr. Favini. Unsurprisingly, exposure to blue light-emitting screens can also cause eye strain and increase the risk of macular degeneration, he explains.

Luckily, all hope isn't lost. A 2018 study published in PLOS One showed that reducing blue light exposure significantly decreased retinal damage that has been linked to high-intensity exposure to blue light. In addition to blue light reduction, the study's authors recommended the use of blue light filters (more on that next) to help protect eye health.

RELATED: 7 Beauty Products That Will Help You Sleep Better

How Can I Cut Back on Blue Light?

For starters, both doctors agree that everyone should abide by the no blue light for two hours before bed rule. You can start small by avoiding technology for one hour prior to bed, and work your way to the two hour goal, Dr. Favini says.

Sound easier said than done? You aren't alone. If your schedule simply doesn't allow you to close your laptop that early (or you just can't stop binging your favorite show), then you might want to try blue-light blocking glasses or even a blue light blocking screen protector for your computer. You can also try enabling nighttime mode on your phone (called Night Shift on the iPhone), a setting that activates a warmer, yellowish light, therefore eliminating blue light during hours when your body should be in rest mode. There are also apps that allow you to do this with other phones, including Bluelight Filter for Eye Care and Twilight: Blue light filter.

No matter the method you choose, Dr. Favini recommends implementing these tools at least two to three hours before bed, especially if you're still hard at work on your laptop or cozied up on the couch with your favorite show. You can also take an all-day approach to filtering out blue light, especially if you find yourself frequently using a laptop, phone, or another device for a large portion of the day. Many blue light glasses, for example, employ clear lenses that can easily pass as everyday glasses (check out the options below).

What Are the Best Blue-Light-Blocking Glasses?

Not sure where to start? This list includes the best blue light blocking glasses that are stylish and help to reduce digital eye strain.

RELATED: These Glasses Block Damaging Blue Light — And They're Super-Cute

I'm going to play favorites with this one and tell you that these are the blue-light-blocking frames I use at home. Pixel's design has helped reduce the feeling that "my eyes are bleeding" by the end of the day (as I like to very dramatically tell my husband). Seriously though, I've noticed that even after a late-night work sesh, I have fewer headaches and can more easily hit the pillow and fall asleep.

These glasses feature the classic amber-hued lenses that help turn blue light into a warm (soothing) glow. One reviewer said it helped ease symptoms related to insomnia, adding: "I am super surprised how much this helps my mind relax before bed, even when watching TV."

Fancy a larger, stylish pair of glasses, but also want to kick blue light to the curb? Check out this style by Free People, which features a thin metallic framed square design.

Want blue light blockers *and* prescription lenses? You'll want to check out Warby Parker, which offers blue light filtering frames that can also accommodate your prescription, whether it be for readers or single-vision lenses.

Looking for a stylish pair of blue light blockers? Check out these ones by TIJN, which come in a number of colors and patterns, including this leopard style. Clear lenses mean you can wear them all day to block out blue light from your computer, which helped one reviewer to notice a significant reduction in headaches. "I have not gotten a single headache since starting to wear these," she wrote. "They also look great and I have gotten a bunch of compliments."