NEWS LESSON

The Small Bedroom Lights We Barely Notice



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes a bedroom feel restful?
2. Would you choose complete darkness or a little light at night?
3. Which bedtime habit would be easiest for you to change?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**circadian**	☐
2	**epidemiological**	☐
3	**observational**	☐
4	**prevalence**	☐
5	**relative**	☐
6	**disturbance**	☐
7	**mobility**	☐
8	**alter**	☐

A	based on watching what happens, not on running an experiment
B	how common something is in a group
C	something that interrupts or upsets sleep or rest
D	to change something a little
E	to do with studying how health problems spread and what causes them in groups of people
F	judged by comparing with something else
G	following a natural cycle of about 24 hours
H	the ability to move around easily

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A 2026 review pooled 15 studies on light at night and sleep disturbance. Its 27% figure is an association, and streetlights, noise and shift patterns are hard to separate.

1 A bedroom can appear dark while remaining surprisingly illuminated. Light leaks around blinds, a phone charges beside the bed and the glow of nearby buildings reaches through the curtains. Because these sources are so familiar, we tend to tune them out. Yet growing research suggests that artificial light at night deserves a place in discussions about sleep health.

2 A charger's glow is one example of small light in a bedroom. The review did not test chargers or any single source. It looked at overall exposure to artificial light at night, which the studies measured in different ways and often estimated rather than recorded at the sleeper's eyes.

3 Our circadian system responds to the daily pattern of light and darkness. Exposure at biologically inappropriate times may alter signals involved in preparing for sleep. A systematic review and meta-analysis published in Environmental Research in March 2026 examined epidemiological research on nighttime illumination and sleep disturbance.

4 Across 15 studies involving more than 765,000 participants, the authors found that higher exposure was associated with poorer sleep. In the studies suitable for pooled analysis, those with the greatest exposure had a 27% higher prevalence of sleep disturbance compared with groups receiving little or no artificial light at night. The figure describes relative association, not an individual's probability of having insomnia. Observational research cannot isolate every influence. People exposed to more nighttime light may also differ in working hours, neighbourhood conditions or existing health problems, all of which complicate interpretation.

5 The limitations are substantial. Most studies had a high risk of bias, and estimates of nighttime illumination are not always accurate representations of what reaches a sleeper's eyes. Residents of brightly lit neighbourhoods may also face additional environmental pressures, including noise and irregular working conditions. Observational evidence cannot easily disentangle these factors.

6 Even so, the findings support reasonable measures to reduce unnecessary exposure: properly fitted blinds, dimmer evening lighting and removing bright electronic displays from the bedside. These adjustments may be easier than changing a demanding work schedule, although cost and housing conditions still influence what people can do. The sensible conclusion is modest rather than alarmist: reduce unnecessary light where possible, without turning another aspect of sleep into a source of relentless anxiety.

7 A simplistic reading of the evidence could lead to the conclusion that less artificial light is always better. In reality, the biological effects of illumination depend on timing, intensity, duration and individual circumstances. Daytime light exposure helps maintain a clear daily rhythm, while adequate nighttime visibility can prevent accidents. Residents with mobility difficulties may need carefully positioned low-level lighting even when darkness would otherwise be preferable.

8 This creates a design challenge rather than a demand to eliminate every light source. Buildings and streets can potentially be illuminated where necessary while reducing unnecessary glare or light spilling into bedrooms. The review's findings therefore have implications for architects and city authorities as well as individuals deciding whether to buy blackout curtains.

9 There is also a wider policy question. Public lighting supports safety and access, so plunging streets into darkness is not a practical solution. Better-designed lighting could balance those benefits with reduced disturbance to residents. A good night's sleep may depend partly on decisions made far beyond the bedroom walls.

Sources: Environmental Research. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Several cities have reduced their street lighting as a result. T F NG
2. The 27% figure means that 27% of people exposed to the most light developed insomnia. T F NG
3. The writer implies that improving street lighting is a better policy than switching it off. T F NG
4. Fitting blinds is presented as easier than changing a demanding work schedule. T F NG
5. The text says residents with mobility difficulties should avoid low-level lighting. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

complicate	correlation	glare	hypothesis	interpretation	modest	pooled	relentless

1. Night after night, the _____ flicker of the lamp outside left her exhausted.
2. Hidden factors tend to _____ any attempt to say what a single streetlamp does.
3. Drivers complained that the new white lamps produced an uncomfortable _____ in wet weather.
4. The authors make only a _____ claim: that cutting needless light is sensible, not that it cures insomnia.
5. Because each trial was small, the researchers _____ the results to see the overall pattern.
6. Without information about diet and income, any _____ of the data must stay cautious.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The limitations of the review are _____ . (SUBSTANCE)
2. Exposure at biologically _____ times may alter sleep signals. (APPROPRIATE)
3. Observational research cannot easily _____ these factors. (TANGLE)
4. A _____ reading could suggest that less light is always better. (SIMPLE)
5. Estimates of nighttime _____ are not always accurate. (ILLUMINATE)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, partners often carry a formal tone: strike a balance, cast doubt on. Choose the partner that sounds natural, not just one that fits the meaning.

balance	cast	growing	inflict	pose	tentative	wield

1. Bright advertising screens near homes could _____ a threat to residents' sleep.
2. A _____ body of research now links nighttime light with poorer sleep.
3. At this stage, the authors can offer only _____ conclusions.
4. Councils must strike a _____ between public safety and residents' sleep.
5. A high risk of bias may _____ doubt on even the most impressive headline figure.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. How could a city make nights darker without making streets feel unsafe?
2. Would you change your bedroom because of one study?
3. What makes health advice easy enough to fit real life?

9 Role-play: lights on or lights off?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the light sleeper

You share a flat. Your flatmate leaves a bright lamp on all night and you can't sleep. Ask for a change. Listen to the reason before you decide what to agree.

Student B · the flatmate

You like a small light on because you get up in the night and want to feel safe. Explain why total darkness worries you and suggest a fair compromise.

Useful phrases

I've been having trouble sleeping lately.
Would you mind turning the lamp off at night?
I'd feel safer with a small light on.
How about a dim nightlight instead?
That's a fair point, but I'm still tired.
Let's try it for a week and see.

Afterwards, tell the class what you agreed and whether it's a fair deal.

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 E · 3 A · 4 B · 5 F · 6 C · 7 H · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 NG · 2 F · 3 T · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 relentless · 2 complicate · 3 glare · 4 modest · 5 pooled · 6 interpretation

6 Word forms

1 substantial · 2 inappropriate · 3 disentangle · 4 simplistic · 5 illumination

7 Language focus

1 pose · 2 growing · 3 tentative · 4 balance · 5 cast

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