NEWS LESSON

The Small Lights You Stopped Noticing Years Ago



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	**association**	☐	A	something that interrupts or upsets sleep or rest
2	**prevalence**	☐	B	how common something is in a group of people
3	**disturbance**	☐	C	a link between two things, where one may not cause the other
4	**exposure**	☐	D	light that makes a place bright
5	**illumination**	☐	E	sensible and possible in real life
6	**realistic**	☐	F	an unfair leaning towards one result
7	**bias**	☐	G	the state of being in contact with something, such as light
8	**manageable**	☐	H	small enough to deal with without much trouble

3 Read

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

The 27% figure is an association rather than proof, and most of the studies carried some risk of bias. Timing matters as much as darkness.

1 When you put out your bedroom light, darkness does not always follow. Streetlamps shine through curtains, a television flashes in the corner and electronic devices display tiny coloured lights. These details are easy to ignore, but researchers increasingly suspect that nighttime lighting can affect sleep quality.

2 Human sleep is influenced by the body's internal clock, which responds partly to patterns of light and darkness. Artificial light late in the evening may interfere with signals associated with preparing for sleep. Researchers also want to understand the effects of exposure during the night itself.

3 A systematic review published in Environmental Research in March 2026 combined evidence from 15 studies involving more than 765,000 people. Participants with the greatest exposure to artificial light at night had a 27% higher prevalence of sleep disturbance than those with little or no exposure. The result was an association, and most included studies had some risk of bias.

4 That distinction matters. People living in brightly lit areas may also experience traffic noise, stressful conditions or other factors linked to poorer sleep. Measuring the light somebody receives is difficult, particularly when researchers rely on outdoor estimates rather than measurements inside bedrooms. Not everybody can simply install perfect blinds. People renting a room or working night shifts may have little control over their sleeping environment, so practical solutions need to be realistic.

5 Nevertheless, there are practical reasons to pay attention to lighting. Curtains that block streetlights, reduced screen brightness before bed and shutting down unnecessary devices may create a more comfortable sleep environment. People working nights or living in busy cities may have fewer options.

6 The timing of light exposure is just as important as its presence. Brightness during the morning and daytime helps the body distinguish waking hours from the night. Excessive illumination close to bedtime may send less helpful signals. A practical approach is therefore not to make homes dark all day, but to provide appropriate lighting at different times. Safety also matters.

7 An older person moving around the house at night may reasonably prefer a low-level light to walking through a completely dark room. Researchers and public-health advisers must balance such needs instead of turning darkness into an absolute rule. Alongside lighting, consistent routines, manageable noise and any underlying medical conditions influence sleep quality. Good advice recognises the whole environment.

8 No single change guarantees good sleep, and persistent difficulties can require professional advice. But the study offers a useful reminder: sleep is influenced by our surroundings as well as our routines. Sometimes improving a bedroom begins with noticing the small sources of light we stopped seeing years ago.

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. Measuring the light somebody receives is difficult. T F NG
2. The review appeared in Environmental Research in March 2026. T F NG
3. Blackout blinds are recommended by sleep doctors. T F NG
4. The review established that light alone causes poor sleep. T F NG
5. The writer thinks homes should be kept dark all day. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

balance	consistent	distinction	evidence	excessive	factors	install	interfere

1. Loud music from next door can _____ with your ability to fall asleep.
2. Many people fail to see the _____ between feeling tired and being ill.
3. We plan to _____ thicker blinds in the spare room next month.
4. Parents often have to _____ their children's needs against their own.
5. A _____ bedtime routine is easier to keep than one that changes every night.
6. Stress and diet are two _____ that can affect how well you sleep.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the review appeared, its authors _____ evidence from 15 studies. (COMBINE)
2. So far, light at night _____ to poorer sleep in several studies. (LINK)
3. At this time tomorrow, I _____ behind my new blackout blinds. (SLEEP)
4. The review _____ in Environmental Research in March 2026. (PUBLISH)
5. If the streetlamp _____ into my room, I would sleep better. (NOT SHINE)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Verb and noun pairs often feel fixed in English. Learn the pair as one chunk, because a near-synonym can sound wrong.

awareness	conclusion	deep	heavy	issue	shed	strong

1. _____ traffic outside the window keeps many residents awake at night.
2. The campaign hopes to raise _____ of how streetlights affect sleep.
3. More data is needed before scientists can draw a firm _____ .
4. A new study may help to _____ light on why some people sleep badly.
5. Doctors often _____ a warning about screens before bed.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 interfere · 2 distinction · 3 install · 4 balance · 5 consistent · 6 factors

6 Verb forms

1 had combined · 2 has been linked · 3 will be sleeping · 4 was published · 5 didn't shine or did not shine or wasn't shining or was not shining

7 Language focus

1 Heavy · 2 awareness · 3 conclusion · 4 shed · 5 issue

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