NEWS LESSON

When Trying to Sleep Better Keeps You Awake



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would a poor sleep score change how you felt about a good night's sleep?
2. What makes health information useful rather than worrying?
3. Would you rather follow a device or how you felt in the morning?

2 Key words

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

1	**infer**	☐	A	deciding that something is not worth considering
2	**retrospective**	☐	B	to work out something from evidence, not from being told
3	**universally**	☐	C	measured and turned into numbers
4	**quantified**	☐	D	a set of rules a computer follows to reach a result
5	**fatigue**	☐	E	small changes or differences from one time to another
6	**algorithm**	☐	F	by everyone, everywhere
7	**variations**	☐	G	a feeling of being very tired
8	**dismissing**	☐	H	looking back at something that has already happened

3 Read

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

Your watch gives you a sleep score before you have decided how you feel. In 2017, clinicians gave the name orthosomnia to patients who became preoccupied with such scores.

1 The watch has judged your night's sleep before you have decided how you feel. It gives you a score, estimates your sleep stages and suggests what needs work. That information can be useful. For some people, though, the effort to get a better score becomes another reason to worry at bedtime.

2 In 2017, clinicians writing in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine introduced the term orthosomnia to describe patients whose pursuit of ideal sleep-tracker measurements appeared to interfere with their relationship with sleep. Their observations were case reports, not evidence that tracking routinely causes insomnia or that orthosomnia is a universally recognised medical diagnosis.

3 The concern arises from a gap between consumer measurements and clinical interpretation. Wrist-worn devices infer sleep characteristics from physiological signals, but estimates of individual sleep stages can be imperfect. If each displayed number is taken at face value as an authoritative verdict, normal variations may start to look like signs of failure. Numbers can inform a conversation with a clinician without becoming a diagnosis in themselves.

4 This creates an unusual feedback loop. A person wakes feeling reasonably well, sees a disappointing score and begins monitoring their tiredness for evidence that the device was correct. The following evening, pressure to perform well may make relaxation more difficult. The original purpose of tracking, to understand and improve rest, risks becoming secondary to achieving a result.

5 Yet dismissing sleep technology entirely would be excessive. Tracking can reveal irregular bedtimes and provide useful information for a discussion with a clinician. The distinction lies in whether measurements inform judgement or replace it. Persistent sleep problems require assessment based on symptoms and appropriate medical evidence, not just a consumer algorithm. The wider paradox is that an attempt to control sleep may introduce the very vigilance that makes rest difficult. Sometimes better habits require stepping away from the dashboard.

6 The appearance of precision gives consumer sleep scores an authority that their underlying methods may not justify. A number displayed with apparent precision can conceal uncertainty about when a person was awake or how accurately particular sleep stages were identified. Users may nevertheless interpret small nightly changes as meaningful evidence of success or failure. This illustrates a broader problem with quantified self-monitoring: measurement can alter the experience being measured.

7 Concern about the result may influence how a person approaches bedtime, while retrospective interpretation of fatigue may become anchored to the device's judgement. Rather than treating tracking as either a breakthrough or a threat, a proportionate approach asks whether the information leads to useful action. If monitoring primarily creates anxiety, its practical value deserves reconsideration.

8 The deeper issue is cultural. We increasingly quantify ordinary human experiences, from exercise to productivity and recovery. Numbers can sharpen awareness, but they also invite comparison and perfectionism. Good sleep is essential; a perfect nightly score is not. Sometimes the healthiest response to an imperfect graph may be to put the device down and carry on with the day.

Sources: Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

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

1. The writer treats a tracker that supports a doctor's judgement differently from one that replaces it. T F NG
2. The writer suggests that a person whose sleep problems persist can safely rely on tracker data alone. T F NG
3. Most sleep-tracker manufacturers fund their own research into accuracy. T F NG
4. A person who feels fine after a poor score may end up noticing tiredness they would otherwise ignore. T F NG
5. The writer sees measuring sleep as an isolated trend rather than part of a wider cultural pattern. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

anchored	conceal	interfere	justify	paradox	perfectionism	sharpen	vigilance

1. A glossy dashboard may _____ the fact that the data behind it is shaky.
2. Constant noise from the street began to _____ with her ability to switch off.
3. A single study of a few patients is too small a sample to _____ such sweeping claims.
4. Her opinion of the film stayed _____ to the first impression she formed in the opening minutes.
5. Expecting every report, essay and meal to be flawless is a sign of _____ .
6. It is a _____ that the harder people try to relax, the less relaxed they become.

6 Word forms

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

1. Many users feel growing _____ about even small dips in their score. (ANXIOUS)
2. A _____ simple score ignores how complicated sleep is. (MISLEAD)
3. The authors avoided broad _____ about the whole population. (GENERAL)
4. The data from budget devices is often _____ , so doctors treat it cautiously. (RELY)
5. The _____ between a helpful habit and an obsession is easy to miss. (DISTINCT)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some of these words introduce a clause, some a noun phrase and some an -ing form. Check what follows the gap before you choose.

albeit	hence	lest	nonetheless	notwithstanding	thereby	whereby

1. The reports were small in scale; _____ , they drew attention to a real pattern.
2. The score offers a comfortable certainty, _____ a false one.
3. Users read each number as a verdict, _____ turning small changes into failures.
4. _____ its limits, tracking can still give clinicians useful information.
5. The reports described a pattern _____ the pursuit of perfect scores seemed to get in the way of sleep itself.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. What should a sleep tracker tell someone besides a score?
2. When does measuring a habit stop helping?
3. Would you try a week without checking your sleep data?

9 Role-play: should we try a sleep tracker?

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

Student A · the tracker fan

You wear a smartwatch and check your sleep score every morning. You think the numbers help you. Explain why, and try to persuade your partner to wear one for a week.

Student B · the sceptic

You don't use a tracker. You think scores can make people worry. Ask questions, say what worries you, then decide: yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Useful phrases

I check my score every morning.

It helps me see my habits.

Don't you think it can make you worry?

I'm not sure the numbers are always right.

I'd try it for a week if I didn't have to check it daily.

Could we agree on one week and then talk again?

Afterwards, tell the class: will your partner try a tracker, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 conceal · 2 interfere · 3 justify · 4 anchored · 5 perfectionism · 6 paradox

6 Word forms

1 anxiety · 2 misleadingly · 3 generalisations or generalizations · 4 unreliable · 5 distinction

7 Language focus

1 nonetheless · 2 albeit · 3 thereby · 4 Notwithstanding · 5 whereby

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