#### Spotlight | Wellbeing

# THE SLEEP DOCTOR

We were fortunate enough to spend some time with Dr Neil Stanley – the Sleep Doctor (our name, not his). Neil is a consultant at lighting specialists FUTURE Designs and the author of 'How to Sleep Well' – and he might just change your life! Here, he reveals a number of commonly held sleep myths...

#### 'Blue' light is bad for us.

We're often told that 'blue' light is bad for us. This is due to the connotations with the light emitted from smartphone, tablet or computer screens.

Light, particularly daylight, has a profound effect on sleep and alertness. When it is dark, the brain produces melatonin, which signals to the body that it's time to sleep. Light, particularly in the blue part of the spectrum, signals to the brain that it is daytime. So it is true that high levels of cool, 'blue' light are bad for us when we're preparing to or trying to sleep. But during the working day, when it is necessary to be alert, blue light is our friend.

I helped lighting experts FUTURE Designs demonstrate these effects through a monitored sleep experiment at FUTURE's new Clerkenwell technology hub earlier in the summer. We created two rooms, each with a controlled lighting environment. One was lit with cool white light (regularly referred to as 'blue' light) and one with warm white light. Two volunteers spent 24 hours under these lighting conditions – one in the warm and one in the cool light. Both were assessed throughout the 24 hours on their levels of alertness and on their mood.

As predicted, both were affected by these lighting conditions – cool white light made it difficult to settle for the night.

Warm white light made concentration on work during the day a little challenging. The volunteer here would have benefitted from cool white light to enable higher levels of alertness and concentration.

So 'blue' light is bad for us if we're attempting to sleep. In fact, all light is. Studies show that even 'blue' light filters make little difference. Turn everything off and get blackout curtains to sleep well.

But during the day, cool 'blue' light keeps you alert, awake and functioning at your best.

#### Eight hours a night is essential for quality sleep.

There are no hard and fast rules about the amount of sleep each of us needs. We all have our own individual need. The normal range is anywhere between 4-11 hours and, like height, is genetically determined. Therefore, you need to get the right

amount of sleep for you. This is the amount of sleep that allows you to feel awake and vital the next day. If you are sleepy during the day, you are probably not getting

## There is no such thing as too much sleep.

enough sleep at night.

Like anything else, it is possible to have too much of a good thing, scientific evidence has shown that too much

scientific evidence has shown that too much sleep is just as harmful to your health and wellbeing as too little.

### You can train your body to need less sleep and reduce your need to four or five hours a night.

Some people naturally need less sleep than others but while you may 'get by' on less sleep than you need, you cannot train yourself to 'need' less sleep. Just one hour less sleep than you need is likely to negatively impact your health, performance and mood. Longer-term partial sleep deprivation is associated with a greater risk of a number of diseases including heart disease, depression, diabetes and obesity.

### Sleeping in separate beds/bedrooms means the relationship is in trouble.

Many people sleep better with the warmth and security of another person next to them, however, much of your sleep disturbance is caused by your bed partner – so some prefer to sleep alone. This is a perfectly natural thing to do and might even improve your relationship because by sleeping better you will be happier, less tired and less resentful of the other

# If you miss out on sleep during the week you can catch up by having a lie-in at the

Catching up on missed sleep is important but a lie-in on the weekend can actually add to sleep disruption and increase sleepiness. Our bodies respond better to regular sleep patterns and the weekend lie-in is disruptive to this pattern. This is why getting up on Monday morning can be so difficult!

#### People need less sleep as they get older.

Older people don't need less sleep, but they do find it more difficult to get the sleep they need and therefore will find their sleep less refreshing. This is because, as people age, they spend less time in the deep, restful stages of sleep – so their sleep is lighter and consequently they are more easily awakened. Older people are also more likely to have insomnia or other medical conditions that disrupt their sleep.

FUTURE Designs is developing concepts based on Human Centric Lighting, which puts emphasis on the visual and non-visual effects of lighting design. The WELL Building Standard promotes buildings designed specifically for human wellbeing and the betterment of human health. Light is one of the seven areas that WELL covers, and Human Centric Lighting will be one of the future trends to emphasise wellbeing in the workplace.

Dr Neil Stanley will be signing copies of his new book How to Sleep Well on Tuesday 25th September, 5-7pm, at Future Designs new technology hub, The Clerkenwell Lighthouse, Dallington Street, Clerkenwell, London, ECIV 0BB.



