

Using e-books and tablets at night 'will keep you awake'

Many of us enjoy snuggling up in bed with a book to wind down at the end of the day.

But scientists have discovered that the millions who read their bedtime stories on a tablet or e-book that emit lights are actually keeping themselves awake.

According to the Mail Online, the scientists found that people who regularly read electronic books before lights out, sleep for fewer hours. This is because the blue glow emitted by the electronic devices can destroy the body's natural rhythm. During the two-week study, 12 participants read electronic books for four hours before bedtime. The experiment was then repeated with printed books. The researchers found that those reading on screens were less sleepy in the evening and took longer to fall asleep. They had reduced levels of melatonin, a hormone which plays a role in inducing sleepiness. And they took nearly ten minutes longer to fall asleep after reading an e-reader compared to reading a printed book. They also had a lower amount of rapid eye movement sleep – a stage thought to be crucial because it is when memories are consolidated. The study was carried out by Penn State and Harvard universities in the US and published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. Lead researcher Dr Anne-Marie Chang said screens can have an "extremely powerful effect" on the body's natural sleep pattern. She added: "Participants reading a light-emitting e-book took longer to fall asleep and had reduced evening sleepiness, reduced melatonin secretion, later timing of their circadian clock and reduced next-morning alertness than when reading a printed book."