

screen about half the time, some scores rose to almost 70 percent when they stared at the LED monitors.

The finding adds to a series of others suggesting, though certainly not proving, that exposure to blue light may keep us more awake and alert, partly by suppressing production of melatonin. An LED screen bright enough and big enough "could be giving you an alert stimulus at a time that will frustrate your body's ability to go to sleep later," said Dr. Brainard. "When you turn it off, it doesn't mean that instantly the alerting effects go away. There's an underlying biology that's stimulated."

Still, nobody is suggesting that we all turn off the lights at dusk and sit in the dark; research into this area is in its infancy. "We are only beginning to understand what really happens under natural conditions," said Mark Rea of the Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York.

Artificial light has been around for more than 120 years. But the light emitted by older sources, like incandescent bulbs, contains more red wavelengths. The problem now, Dr. Brainard and other researchers fear, is that our world is increasingly illuminated in blue. By one estimate, 1.6 billion new computers, televisions and cellphones were sold last year alone, and incandescent lights are being replaced by more energy-efficient, and often bluer, bulbs.

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A version of this article appeared in print on July 5, 2011, on page D5 of the New York edition with the headline: In Eyes, a Clock Calibrated by

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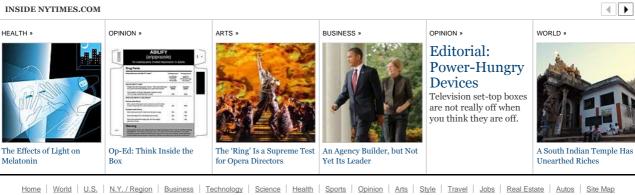
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