



Context to the nugget

Matthew speaks about the impact of blue light emitting devices (TV, Phone, Tablet, Computer etc.) on sleep patterns. Apart from reducing the number of hours of sleep, he also says that it comes in the way of the restorative Non Rapid Eye Movement sleep and the impact sometimes can last several days. He also speaks about regulating the torrent of anxiety that hits us during the night or first thing in the morning.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And as we come towards the end of the conversation, I want to talk a little bit about technology Matt and the proliferation of light emitting devices. There's clearly a lot of clutter in terms of what people are hearing in terms of the impact of these devices on sleep and in terms of their attention. Give us a sense of how we should think about this issue. What are the watch-outs if you really had to cut through the clutter and give the listeners some tactical inputs on how they should deal with their devices whether it's a phone or a tablet or a computer or a television? What are the issues that you feel people don't understand enough?

Matthew Walker (MW): Certainly, we know that the invasion of technology into the bedroom or just before we enter into the bedroom has been a deleterious impact on our sleep, and there are a variety of ways that technology impacts our sleep. The first and perhaps most obvious from a sleep science perspective is the blue light emitting devices and LED screens and phones and tablets. There was a study done by folks at Harvard Medical School and they showed that if you compare one hour of iPad reading before bed versus just reading a normal book under dim light, in those individuals who read the iPad firstly there was about a 50% reduction in a critical sleep regulating hormone called melatonin. And furthermore, the peak of that melatonin was delayed by about three hours and that melatonin peak helps my brain and body understand when it's night time and when it wants to sleep. So here in California if I read an iPad for one hour before bed my body clock would be fooled into thinking it's much closer to Hawaii Time than it actually is to California time. And they also found in that study that one hour of iPad reading before bed disrupted the amount of rapid eye movement sleep or dream sleep and even when they stopped reading the iPad there was still a blast radius that the sleep disruption continued for several days later almost as though there was a washout period. But there are other ways that technology impacts our sleep. Another component is what we call sleep procrastination, which is that you could feel perfectly tired and you are perfectly capable of falling asleep and staying asleep, but these devices perhaps if you are using them even in bed you think well, oh, I'll just check Facebook that one last time or I'll just send that last e-mail or I'll just look on Twitter for that one last time and all of a sudden you look up and it's 30 minutes later and now you are short changed on your sleep by half an hour. So, sleep procrastination is another component. We also know that many people keep their phones next to them in their bedroom and

some people or non-trivial amount of people will report actually waking up in the night and actually checking their phone and even if they don't do that simply having the phone next to them on their bed creates what we call anticipatory anxiety that disrupts sleep. So, a better example of this is let's say that you have a very early morning flight, the night before knowing that it's there waiting for you the next morning you typically don't sleep as well. And in fact, the degree of that anxiety of that anticipation correlates with the degree of impairment in that deep restorative non-rapid eye movement sleep. Now having your phone next to you in the morning is a lighter version of that sort of more acute scenario and the reason is because for many of us when we wake up in the morning the first thing that we do is reach for our phone and we swipe right, we unlock the phone and then this torrent of anxiety comes rushing into our world: emails, latest tweets that have happened and what you do by having your phone next to you at your bedside is train your brain to anticipate and expect that anxiety each and every morning and it can decrease the quality and the quantity of your sleep. So, the advice there would be firstly let's see if we can try to have a wind-down routine where in the last hour before bed you try to stay away from screens and those blue light devices. And secondly, if you are going to have your phone next to you the advice normally would be try to keep your phone outside of your bedroom. But if you have to have it there see if you can do an experiment and ask yourself can you simply not look at your phone for the first five minutes upon waking in the morning and see if that makes you feel a little bit more relaxed and more comfortable around your morning routine. And then if you achieve five minutes try do 10 minutes and then perhaps see if you could not check your phone until you have had your morning cup of tea or coffee and you'll be surprised that how much that helps both your mental health as well as your physiological sleep health.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds of something that came up in my chat with Rich Fernandez (RF), CEO of Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, an initiative that started as a Leadership Development program in Google but now is set up as an independent organization that helps individuals and companies build more mindfulness in their leaders.

RF: "What I would say is ritualize it and routinize it so make it a ritual or routine so personally for me it's the first thing I do when I wake up, I latterly get up from beds, splash water on my face and I go down stair to my office and then I sit in the morning. This is early morning before the sun is up, I mean early riser and before my family is awake, before I check my email or open up the laptop or look at my phone or anything it's the first thing I do and then second thing I do is I brush my teeth."

DJ: A related point came up in my chat with James Clear (JC) – Author of Atomic Habits. He speaks about the power of a gateway habit for us to get started on something.

JC: "So, the two-minute rule says take whatever habit you are trying to build and scale it down to something that takes two minutes or less to do. So, read 40 books a year becomes read one page or do yoga 4 days a week becomes take out my yoga mat and sometimes when I say that people resist a little bit because you are like okay, I know the real goal isn't just to take my yoga mat out like I know I actually want to do the workout. So, if it's this mental trick and I know it's a trick like why I would fall for it. Then if you feel that way, I understand that but I would suggest for the first day or the first week actually force yourself to stop after two minutes. So, I tell this story of a reader named Mitch and I mentioned this in the book and he ended up losing a lot of weight, 100 pounds, so 40 kilograms or something like that and when he went to the gym for the first time he wasn't allowed to stay for longer than 5 minutes. So, he would show up at the gym, work out for... do half an exercise, get back in the car, drive home and it sounds silly, right, it sounds ridiculous because you

are like this is not going to get the guy the results that he wants but what you realize if you step back is that he was mastering the art of showing up, he was becoming the type of person that went to the gym 4 days a week even if it was only for 5 minutes. And this I think is a much deeper truth about habits that's often overlooked which is a habit must be established before it can be improved, right, you have to make it the standard in your life, make it the new normal before you can worry about optimizing it or expanding it from there"

DJ: It is worth thinking about the small gateway habit you can set up for yourself to get started on the way you relate to the electronic devices.

Thank you for listening. If you are finding this conversation purposeful, you might also like to tune into my conversation with Matt Dixon a Triathlon coach in Silicon Valley, who specifically speaks about the role of rest and recovery when you train for triathlons.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rich Fernandez that is referenced: [Developing the meditation habit](#).

Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [2 minute rule - the gateway habit](#).

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Matthew Walker - Nuggets

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- 55.03 Matthew Walker - Dealing effectively with Jet-lag
- 55.04 Matthew Walker - How much sleep do we REALLY need?
- 55.05 Matthew Walker - REM and Non-REM sleep and criticality of each
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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