

# Dim All the Lights, Sweet Darlin'

- Bill Everhart

Okay, I admit it! I've fallen asleep while watching TV in bed and allowed the glow from the screen to light up the room all night long. There, I've said it! And you know what else? I've also gone to sleep with the screen of my laptop computer softly aglow. (I don't want to miss an important middle-of-the-night Facebook post, you know!) But is this behavior really all *that* big of a deal? Well, yes – yes, it is.

A recent study suggests there is now evidence that not only does the light from these devices keep us from sleeping well, but it can also cause depression. In fact, there has been concern for many years that our ever-increasing exposure to artificial light is, indeed, affecting our moods.

The study revealed that hamsters exposed to light at night (Yes, that's right, they did the study using hamsters!) showed symptoms associated with depression. And while I'm not quite sure how one tells if a hamster is suffering from depression or not (unless, of course, they're smoking more than they usually do), it does seem to make sense that if a person's sleep is disrupted, he or she might notice an increase in depressive symptoms. Regardless, a restful night's sleep is always good for what ails you, and, therefore, anything done to ensure a good night's rest is sure to be helpful to an overall sense of well-being. *And*, it reasons, that would include dimming the lights.

As a mental health professional, and one who talks repeatedly with clients about the importance of good self-care – including getting a good night's sleep – I know this stuff. In fact, I routinely advise clients when preparing for sleep to dim all the lights (and to turn off the television, cell phone, Nook, and iPod), close their eyes, and drift quietly off into La La Land. The idea is to eliminate all light sources from the environment, so the body can relax and they can get a good night's sleep.

Truth be told, though, I'm feeling just a little bit guilty, because, as I mentioned above, I 'm not always very good at practicing what I preach. (Did I mention that I'm also a minister? Oh well.)

Do you sleep with the TV on? Laptop? iPod? Does your cellphone chime in with "alerts" throughout the night? How's that workin' for ya?



*Editor's Note:* Bill Everhart is a member of PCNV working at our centers in Herndon, Manassas, and Springfield. Bill maintains two of his own websites: [billeverhartcounseling.com](http://billeverhartcounseling.com); and his blog at [saymoreaboutthat.blogspot.com](http://saymoreaboutthat.blogspot.com), on which this article also appears.