



ARE LEDS REALLY GOOD FOR US?

Celebrity interior designer Nikki Hunt, founder of Design Intervention, wants homeowners to rethink the way they are illuminating their interiors.

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We've all been told that LED lights are the future—energy-efficient, long-lasting, and environmentally friendly. They're in our homes, offices, schools, and even streetlights. But what if I told you that while LEDs might be great for your electricity bill, they might not be so great for you?

This isn't about resisting progress. It's about understanding the full picture. We've replaced the old incandescent bulbs with LEDs without considering what kind of light our bodies actually need.

NOT ALL LIGHT IS THE SAME

For most of history, humans lived in sync with natural light cycles. We woke up with the sun, spent the day in bright, full-spectrum daylight, and wound down in the evening with the warm glow of fire or candlelight. It wasn't just cosy, it was essential.

The sun provides a rich, ever-changing spectrum of light, including wavelengths we don't see, like ultraviolet (UV) and infrared (IR). Each part of the spectrum plays a role in keeping us healthy. Infrared supports metabolism and keeps our cells working efficiently, while UV light is essential for vitamin D production, which supports our immune system and bone health. But LEDs? Unlike sunlight, which contains all the colours of the rainbow, LEDs produce a limited spectrum. They don't just lack infrared and ultraviolet light—they also miss many of the colours found in natural daylight. Instead, they emit a narrow, blue-heavy light, lacking the balance of reds, greens, and other wavelengths that our bodies need.

Think of light like food. Our bodies need a balance of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates to function

properly. Light works the same way, we need a mix of wavelengths to stay healthy. But most modern lighting schemes give us just one thing—blue light, coming from a single direction at a single intensity. It's like living on diet of Oreo cookies alone. Just like junk food fills you up without nourishing you, LEDs let you see but don't provide what your body needs.

WHY INFRARED MATTERS: THE MISSING PIECE

Infrared light isn't just warmth, it supports our metabolism and aids healing. Recent studies shows that it helps protect against diabetes and obesity. Without it, metabolism suffers. And while LEDs don't directly cause weight gain or metabolic disorders, they remove an important protective factor.

YOUR BODY'S INTERNAL CLOCK: WHY LIGHT TIMING MATTERS

Our bodies have an internal clock, our circadian rhythm, that tells us when to wake up, be alert, and wind down. And guess what? Light is its primary regulator.

Morning sunlight, which includes both blue and infrared light, signals wakefulness and sets our body clock for the day. But as the day ends, the light softens as the angle of the sun changes and the light becomes warmer telling the body it's time to rest.

LEDs don't work this way. They emit a high proportion of blue light, which is stimulating, great in the morning, but terrible at night. Blue light suppresses melatonin, the hormone that helps us sleep, and melatonin disruption has been linked to increased blood pressure, a higher risk of heart disease, and even cancer.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

Light doesn't just affect sleep and metabolism—it plays a huge role in mental health too.

Bright, cool-toned light at night can increase stress, worsen anxiety, and even contribute to depression. That's because blue light at the wrong time interferes with serotonin and dopamine, the brain's feel-good chemicals that regulate mood.

FLICKER: THE UNSEEN STRESSOR

Unlike old-school incandescent bulbs, which provide steady light, most LEDs flicker at ultra-high speeds—too fast for the eye to detect but still processed by the brain. This pulsing can cause eye strain, fatigue, anxiety and difficulty concentrating.

SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Choose low-flicker LEDs. Look for high-quality, flicker-free options.

Limit blue light exposure at night. Switch to amber or red-toned lights in the evening. Use table lamps instead of bright overhead lights, and if you must use LEDs, dimming them helps.

Get natural sunlight during the day. Morning sunlight regulates your circadian rhythm and provides infrared for metabolism and UV for vitamin D production.

Step outside or open a window. Most windows block both infrared and UV light, so to get the full benefits, spend time outdoors whenever possible.

Consider infrared light exposure. If you spend most of your time indoors under LEDs, red light therapy can help restore some of the missing infrared wavelengths.