I Tried a Wake-up Light. Here’s Why You Should Too.

*by Brianna Velling*

In my hometown in Southern Utah, in the dead of what we call “winter” the sun doesn’t come up until nearly 8am. This is a big problem for me. With winter quickly approaching–and along with it, the shorter hours before and after the standard American workday–I dread the groggy, heavy-eyed, late-to-everything mornings ahead of me.

Waking up to pitch-black can all but ruin any chance of getting the day off to a good start. Fortunately, I recently remembered something that I hoped might help save me from the coming darkness.

Wake-up lights have received little attention over the past few years as the average Joe’s aide to a better morning. Most think of light therapy as a tool for those suffering from seasonal affective disorder or those living in an Alaskan style winter or summer. However, the scientific research behind light therapy has led to some innovative solutions for everyday humans (like myself) dreaming of better sleep and refreshed mornings.

Essentially, exposure to light helps you wake up. Why? When it’s dark, your brain starts to produce melatonin–the stuff that makes you sleepy. So, if you are exposed to light while you’re asleep your brain stops that process. The melatonin recedes, and you wake up.

Several companies looking to take advantage of this internal process have generated various wake-up light solutions: from cost effective knock-offs found all over the internet to highly advanced–and thus more spendy–name brand versions. The knock-off versions can cost anywhere from $10-$50 on sites like Walmart.com or Amazon; you might have luck trying one out while saving a few bucks.

For me, trying one of these wallet-friendly options turned into a bit of a misadventure. After oversleeping (and subsequently arriving late to work), I realized that the sound part of the alarm only went off for two minutes–among other issues. This disappointed me, greatly, since I had heard so many amazing things about the revolutionary effects a wake-up light could have on my daily routine and overall wellbeing. When I finally broke down and decided to try the “real deal,” I went for a mid-range best seller: the Philips Wake-up Light.

As a snooze-aholic, I worried that my dreams would be dashed, and I would revert to setting my six alarms (in seven-minute increments spanning 40 minutes) in order to make it out of bed “on-time.” In a surprising turn of events, when I woke up, I felt *awake*. Let’s be honest, I still hit snooze and laid in bed resting for a minute or so, but I laid with mind alert, almost happy. Since then, I have reached the point where, instead of getting up after whacking the snooze eight times, I might hit that button once, and get up within ten minutes of my alarm clock sounding off.

The most important feature of my wake-up light is the simulated sunrise color spectrum of the light itself. The colors that radiate from the wake-up light mirror the natural lighting of the sunrise as it gradually fades-in from deep purpleish red to an invigorating, daylight white. Some of the more basic, less costly lights simply fade-in like raising a dimmer switch from a dim white to bright white. When I used one such light, the starkness jolted me awake before the sound went off, creating a confused, rather than refreshed morning feeling.

Another surprisingly helpful feature of my wake-up light: the simulated *sunset* for use before falling asleep. This sunset mode plays the light colors in reverse: starting off as a bright reading light, fading into a calming glow and finally drifting from deep twilight into tranquil, bedtime darkness. This brilliant nighttime fade-out promotes a natural send-off into a more restful night’s sleep.

Of course, before I purchased my light, I was skeptical. I pushed the “place order” button, out of pure desperation. However, now that I am the proud owner of a wake-up light and a newly-minted morningish person, every day I look forward to not pressing the snooze button.