



slumber PARTY

DO YOU PUT OFF GOING TO SLEEP AND SUFFER FOR IT LATER? IF SO, IT'S TIME TO END BEDTIME PROCRASTINATION, WRITES EVELYN LEWIN.

Almost every morning, as I tear myself away from my cosy bed, I make the same promise: tonight, I will go to sleep early. I won't stay up watching TV. And then, when I go to bed, I won't check Facebook (and Twitter) "just one last time". No, tonight will be different.

But as each day ends, sleep is the last thing on my mind. I'm tired, sure, but I love those hours when the kids are asleep and the house is quiet, and I can unwind after a hectic day. I bask in the luxury of time to myself. Before I know it, I'm heading to bed aware that, come morning, I'll regret the hours I wasted that could have been spent sleeping.

My biggest problem is that my views on going to bed are totally different at night versus in the morning. You see, Late Night Me can easily justify the time she spends doing nothing. She needs those hours to herself, she argues.

More than that, she deserves them.

Like a child wolfing down biscuits in the corner, Late Night Me knows she will be reprimanded for her behaviour eventually, but it feels so good that she just can't stop. It doesn't help that Early Morning Me is such a future version of myself she doesn't seem real.

But the next morning, Early Morning Me is real. In fact, she's not only real, she's also tired, bleary-eyed and angry. Early Morning Me simply can't understand why it's so difficult for Late Night Me to just go to sleep at night.

Though I've been doing this for years, the authors of new research have given this phenomenon a name: bedtime procrastination. They define this as "Failing to go to bed at the intended time while no external circumstances prevent a person from doing so." And, if you've ever promised yourself you'll go to bed at the next ad break,

or that you'll turn the light off after the next chapter, you're doing it, too.

The Dutch study, published last year in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, surveyed 177 respondents and found that those who lacked self-regulation when it came to going to bed (that is, bedtime procrastinators) also reported not getting enough sleep and feeling fatigued the next day. When put that way, going to bed earlier seems the obvious solution. Yet while I know my procrastination is causing me to suffer in the morning, I can't seem to stop.

Clinical psychologist Dr Lara Winten, from the Sydney ACT Centre, gets it. As the self-confessed bedtime procrastinator explains, "For all of us – psychologists included – there's a vast chasm between what we know is helpful for us and what we actually put into practice."

She believes the modern-day culprit for sleep procrastination is social media. Because such activities have no definitive end point, "It's very easy to continue mindlessly engaging without [being aware] of the passing of time."

Dr David Cunnington, a sleep physician and director of the Melbourne Sleep Disorders Centre, says it's also common in insomniacs. For them, the thought of going to bed but being unable to sleep is so unappealing "they try to put off the inevitable struggle".

Another cause, says Winten, is that we're all programmed to pursue pleasure. Hence the idea of watching one more episode of *Homeland* is way more enticing than sleep (Late Night Me couldn't agree more). But, she adds, we have to weigh the effects of how much fun we're having at night against how ordinary we'll feel the next morning. "For that reason, our perception of the impact of staying up a 'little bit later' will likely be very different at 11.30pm compared to 6am the next morning."

If you want to wake refreshed, the experts say there are ways to stop bedtime procrastinating. Winten advises becoming mindful about the activity you are doing and how much time it's taking. She recommends allocating yourself a self-appointed "acceptable" time frame in which to do the activity, then stop.

Cunnington advises setting a prompt – such as an alarm clock – to remind yourself when to switch off and go to bed. Once you start going to bed earlier and waking refreshed, keep up the good behaviour. "You'll start to feel much better in the morning without feeling like you're missing out on too much at night," says Winten.