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City sleep-deprived due to stress and increased screentime: Experts

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Several studies were recently published on sleep patterns in India over the course of the pandemic but the results were mixed. While one study stated that 54 per cent of Indians have slept more over the shutdown, another said the pandemic has negatively affected Indian sleep patterns.



In Chennai, according to local experts, the latter is more applicable, with the shutdown affecting not only the quantity of sleep but the quality of sleep as well.

Multiple factors have led to poor sleep pattern among locals. From stressing over the shutdown to work from home disrupting work-life balance, as well as increased screen usage, several factors have affected many, which, in turn, has led to several health issues.

“There have been reports of erratic sleep patterns — ranging from too little to too much sleep. This has led to the manifestation of metabolic issues like diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol issues and other metabolic diseases in those who have not had them in the past. While COVID continued to spread across the city, non-communicable diseases like this have also increased greatly,” said DS Jayaraman, Senior Consultant Pulmonologist, MGM Health Care.

While people have been sleeping for longer hours owing to disruption of sleep timings, experts state that the quality of sleep has been affected greatly, which has led to the manifestation of issues like sleep apnea. “Obstructive sleep apnea is one of the biggest problems we see. The issue is that many are unaware of the importance of this diagnosis because it relates to several comorbid conditions like diabetes, obesity, and cardiac and mental health issues. Even physicians are unaware of this disease,” said Dr Spoorthi Arun, Internal Medicine Physician, Promed Hospital, and Director Clinical Practices, Indian Society of Lifestyle Medicine.

Another rising issue among the younger population is insomnia, said Dr Bhuvaneshwari Rajendran, Consultant Neurology and Neurophysiology, Kauvery Hospital, with several cases of mild to moderate cases being diagnosed throughout the shutdown.

“Insomnia is very prevalent among the younger population specifically. This is mostly due to issues like increased screentime and stress and anxiety. Many approach me and ask for medication immediately, without knowing that it takes simple lifestyle changes to fix this issue,” she said. In general, sleep hygiene — related to sleep timings, sleep environment and eating and drinking before bed — in the city is poor, said experts.