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# How to sleep better

## 'Getting enough quality sleep is more important now than ever'

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Getting a good night's sleep can help to maintain both our physical and mental health as well as reducing our risk of accidents and injuries. Sleep also impacts directly on our immune systems. Sleep deprivation increases the risk of inflammation in the body, which in turn increases our susceptibility to viruses and other diseases.



Getting enough quality sleep is more important now than ever in order to maintain good physical health and emotional wellbeing during exceptionally difficult times.

Stress and worry are known to have a very detrimental impact on sleep. For many people, worry can start when their heads hit the pillow and they try to process the events of the day or manage the worries they have about the future. Watching the news or reading updates about COVID-19 in the evening can generate new worries and fears that can interfere with our ability to fall asleep.

Only one thing seems certain at present: there will be more uncertainty to come and, with it, increasing levels of worry and anxiety. Our bodies respond to this uncertainty by flooding us with chemicals to help us deal with the threat, activating a powerful fight or flight stress response. Normally these hormones subside once a threat has passed and our bodies return to balance. However, in periods of prolonged stress, the body remains in an ever-ready fight mode, which impacts sleep.

With many people now working at home, the boundaries between work space and home space can become blurred and restful sleep environments can become contaminated with the stress of working or home schooling.

Top tips for promoting positive sleep during COVID-19

Make time to unwind: spend some time relaxing and watching, listening or reading about things that have nothing to do with COVID-19. This is especially important in the hour or so before going to sleep.

Assign worry time: set aside specific worry periods during which you let yourself consider the worries of the day. Keep this period away from bedtime.

Put pen to paper: putting your emotions into words can also help you get through stressful events. This can help you organise your thoughts and better cope with your emotions.

Limit your media exposure: Limit your updates to once or twice a day and to one or two sources. Be sensible about what you learn about COVID-19. Check official websites and don't pay too much attention to gossip and scaremongering.

Create a healthy sleep environment: Separate your work and home space as much as possible. Remove any screens from your bedroom and reduce screen time before bed.

Remember to breathe: When you feel yourself getting worked up, pay attention to the length of your exhales and inhales. Try to breathe less than 12 breaths a minute. Slower respirations decrease the body's stress response.

Try relaxation techniques: Meditation and mindfulness can help you unwind before bedtime.

Your bed is predominantly for sleep: Keep a strong association between your bed and sleeping. If you go to bed and find that you cannot get to sleep, or if you wake up during the night, get up and do something relaxing in dim light that is quiet and away from the bedroom. Go back to bed when you feel ready to fall asleep.

Improve your bedtime routine: This will mean you can switch off and sleep easier. Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol, as these can make anxiety worse.

Exercise regularly: There are many things you can do to keep exercising even if you're at home more than usual or self-isolating. Look online for inspiration and ideas on how to use your home as a safe and effective workout space.

Keep a regular sleep-wake routine: Going to bed at the same time each night, and getting up at the same time each morning is important for getting a good night of sleep.

For more guidance on looking after your emotional wellbeing during these uncertain times go to nuffieldhealth/at-home

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