

# The Importance of Sleep During the Pandemic



Sleep is a critical biological process, and it's always important. When confronting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, however, sleep becomes even more essential because of its wide-ranging benefits. Sleep is critical to physical health and effective functioning of the immune system. It's also a key promoter of emotional wellness and mental health, helping to ease stress, depression and anxiety.

Here are steps you can take to improve your sleep:

## Set a schedule and routine

Establishing a routine can facilitate a sense of normalcy even in abnormal times. It's easier for your mind and body to acclimate to a consistent sleep schedule, which is why health experts have long recommended avoiding major variation in your daily sleep times. Sleep-specific aspects of your daily schedule should include:

- Wake-up time: Set your alarm, bypass the snooze button, and have a fixed time to get every day started.
- Wind-down time: This is an important time to relax and get ready for bed. It can involve things like light reading, stretching and meditating along with preparations for bed like putting on pajamas and brushing your teeth.
- Bedtime: Pick a consistent time to turn out the lights and try to fall asleep.

It also can be helpful to incorporate steady routines to provide time cues throughout the day, including:

- Showering and getting dressed even if you aren't leaving the house.
- Eating meals at the same time each day.
- Blocking off specific time periods for work and exercise.

## Reserve your bed for sleep

Sleep experts emphasize the importance of creating an association in your mind between your bed and sleep. For this reason, they recommend only using your bed for sleep and sex. So, for example, avoid bringing a laptop into bed to work or to watch a movie or series.

On any given night, if you're having a hard time sleeping, don't spend more than 20 minutes tossing and turning. Instead, get out of bed and do something relaxing in very low light, and then head back to bed to try to fall asleep.

In addition, frequently changing your sheets, fluffing your pillows, and making your bed can keep your bed feeling fresh, creating a comfortable and inviting setting to doze off.

### See the light

Exposure to light plays a crucial role in helping our bodies regulate sleep in a healthy way. As you deal with disruptions to daily life, you may need to take steps, so light-based cues have a positive effect on your internal sleep-wake cycle, also known as your circadian rhythm.

- If you can, spend some time outside in natural light. Even if the sun isn't shining brightly, natural light still positively affects your circadian rhythm.
- As much as possible, open windows and blinds to let light into your home during the day.
- Be mindful of screen time. Electronic devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers, produce blue light that can interfere with the body's natural sleep-promoting processes. You also can use device settings or special apps to reduce or filter blue light.

### Be careful with naps

While a short power nap early in the afternoon can be useful to some people, it's best to avoid long naps or naps later in the day because they can hinder nighttime sleep.

### Stay Active

Regular daily activity has numerous important benefits, including for sleep. For example, go for a walk, or check out online resources for all types and levels of exercise, such as live-streaming classes from gyms, yoga and dance studios.

### Practice kindness and foster connection

It might not seem critical to your sleep, but kindness and connection can reduce stress, and its harmful effects on mood and sleep. Seek out some positive stories, and use technology to stay in touch with loved ones to maintain social connections.

### Use relaxation techniques

Finding ways to relax can be a potent tool in improving your sleep. Deep breathing, stretching, yoga, mindfulness meditation, calming music and reading are a few relaxation techniques.

Another relaxation strategy is to avoid becoming overwhelmed by information. For example:

- Bookmark one or two trusted news sites and visit them only during a limited, pre-set amount of time each day.
- Cut down time spent scrolling on social media.
- Schedule virtual visits with friends and family, and agree in advance to focus on topics other than COVID-19.

### Watch what you eat and drink

Keeping a healthy diet can promote good sleep. In particular, be cautious with the intake of alcohol and caffeine, especially later in the day, as both can disrupt the quantity and quality of your sleep.

### Get information from trusted resources

It's important to have resources for reliable, evidence-based information. Two such sources are the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). Their websites offer key, up-to-date information about COVID-19.

### Contact a physician, if necessary

If you have severe or worsening sleep or other health problems, consult a physician.

Source:  
SleepFoundation.org

This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 if you are in the United States or the local emergency services phone number if you are outside the United States, or go to the nearest accident and emergency department. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and all its components, in particular services to family members below the age of 16, may not be available in all locations and is subject to change without prior notice. Experience and/or educational levels of Employee Assistance Program resources may vary based on contract requirements or country regulatory requirements Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

Optum® is a registered trademark of Optum, Inc. in the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All other brand or product names are trademarks or registered marks or the property of their respective owners. Optum is an equal opportunity employer.

© 2020 Optum, Inc. All rights reserved. WF998385 204128-072020 OHC OHC