



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

SLEEP

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People are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine and physical distancing in different ways. For some, this time has become a welcome opportunity to catch up on needed sleep. However, many people are experiencing problems with their sleep. They may have a hard time falling asleep and lay awake worrying, thinking, or tossing and turning. Others wake up in the middle of the night and are unable to return to sleep. Many others are oversleeping and spending far more time in bed than they intend. The lack of a job, school or daily activities has left many people without a daily routine. Alarms may not be set, leaving people to wake up late in the day. Some people may use sleep to escape from feeling bored, anxious, or depressed and may even turn to sleep-aid medications to help them sleep the time away. If you're having any of these sleep problems, we hope this wellness guide will improve your sleep hygiene, or habits for healthy sleep, so you can feel better and more awake during the day. To avoid getting overwhelmed, take baby steps and try one thing at a time until you find something that works for you and then stick with that behavior. Once you have mastered that, add a new strategy and see if you notice an improvement in your sleep. Helpful resources are also included.

Prioritize Good Sleep Hygiene or Healthy Sleep Habits

- Aim to get 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
 - Avoid naps after 3pm
 - Keep all naps less than 30 minutes
- Get ready for bed and get out of bed at around the same time every day
- Use your bed for sleep and sex only, if possible
 - Spend the day in a different room than your bedroom
 - Sit somewhere other than your bed for all other activities if you have to stay in your bedroom during the day
- Avoid using electronics (e.g., cell phones, TVs) for at least 30 minutes to 1 hour before bed – the light from the devices causes your brain to get excited and makes it more difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep
 - Switch your electronic device to “dark” or “nighttime” mode if you cannot avoid using it in the hours leading up to bed
- Make sure the place you sleep is as comfortable as possible
 - Set the thermostat to a cooler temperature at night



- Close curtains and blinds to make the room as dark as possible
- Invest in the best sheets and bedding you can afford
- Buy inexpensive ear plugs or eye masks to help you create a better sleeping environment
- Limit your substance use -
 - Avoid drinking alcohol several hours before falling asleep
 - Do not drink heavily (women - less than 1 drink per day, for men - less than 2 drinks per day)
 - Avoid nicotine for at least several hours before sleeping
 - Avoid caffeine after noon
- Create a bedtime routine to prepare your body and mind for a good night's sleep
 - Journal your thoughts about the day
 - Take a warm shower or bath about 1-2 hours prior to going to bed
 - Do some light stretching
- Exercise during the day – morning or early afternoon exercise is best, because exercising strenuously within 5 hours of falling asleep could make sleep more difficult
- Try to obtain some sunlight during the day – this light will help reset your body's internal clock so it is ready to sleep at night and stay asleep until morning

Help Yourself Sleep More – For People Who are Not Sleeping Enough

- Follow good sleep hygiene habits outline above
- Wait until you are sleepy to get into bed
- Get out of bed and do a calming activity, like listening to a meditation app or reading something boring (like the refrigerator manual!) if you are in bed for 20 minutes or longer without falling asleep
 - Go to another room if possible
 - Sit somewhere other than your bed if you must stay in your room
 - Keep the lights as dim as possible
 - Do something calming but not too interesting like listening to a mediation app, reading something boring, doing light stretches, doing breathing exercises
- Get back into bed once you find yourself getting sleepy
- Be patient
 - Give yourself time to fall asleep
 - Get out of bed if you still can't sleep and repeat the steps above
- Use the same techniques listed above if you wake up, even in the middle of the night, and can't get back to sleep
- Wake up at the same time every day, even if you spend a lot of the night awake
- Stick with this strategy even if it does not work at first



- Stay with it for some time to retrain your brain that the bed is for sleeping
- Keep it up once it works

Help Yourself Sleep Less – For People Who are Sleeping Too Much

- Follow good sleep hygiene habits outline above
- Set an alarm at the same time each morning, if you have trouble waking up
 - Place your alarm across the room to make yourself get out of bed to turn it off, if you have a hard time stopping yourself from hitting snooze
 - Get an app that has a loud alarm that will definitely wake you up
- Avoid medications that cause you to be sleepy or drowsy.
 - Decrease the amount of medication you take to fall asleep if you usually need medication to help you fall asleep
 - Avoid taking any sleeping medications if you wake up in the middle of the night
 - Do not suddenly stop taking any medications without discussing with your doctor
- Do not use sleep as a coping mechanism or way to “escape” the day – it is not an effective way to manage stress
 - Find alternatives to cope with your stress and anxiety
 - Spend time virtually talking to family or friends
 - Exercise (even if that just means going for a brief walk)
 - Take time to prepare healthier foods you may not normally have time to make
 - Meditate or pray
 - Spend time doing your hobbies or start a new hobby

Pay Attention to Your Emotional Well-Being as It May Affect Your Sleep

- Recognize the signs of depression and anxiety listed below, which often are linked to sleep problems
 - Feel anxious, afraid, irritable, sad, irritable, guilty, worthless
 - Worry a lot and cannot get certain thoughts out of your mind
 - Have less interest in normal activities or things that you normally enjoy
 - Are unable rest or sit still
 - Have less energy than usual
 - Have less ability to concentrate
 - Have a change in appetite (either much hungrier or much less hungry)



- Thinking you would be better off not alive or consider hurting or killing yourself
- Seek assistance for your depression or anxiety, as well as your sleep problems
 - Call your primary care doctor for a referral to a mental health professional
 - Talk to your Employee Assistance program about a referral to a mental health professional

Seek Professional Help if Needed for your Sleep Difficulties

- Do not dismiss your symptoms just because everyone is having issues with the current pandemic
 - Notice sleep problems beyond sleeping too much or too little (snoring, having your breath pause while you are asleep, experiencing leg movements that keep you from falling asleep, falling asleep when you are driving or in other dangerous situations)
 - Remember that trouble with sleep can be a sign of a sleep disorder or a sign of an underlying psychological or medical problem or both
 - Do not let your sleep problems interfere with daily life
- Talk to a healthcare professional about your sleep problems to improve your everyday functioning
 - Contact your primary care provider if you are having sleep problems and mention other psychological symptoms as well and they can determine if you need a consultation with a sleep specialist
 - Reach out to a sleep specialist if your sleep problems get in the way of doing what you need to do during the day
 - Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) or 911 if you are having suicidal thoughts

Helpful Resources

- American Academy of Family Physicians: <https://familydoctor.org/condition/insomnia/>
- CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/index.html
- <http://sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits>
- <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>
- <https://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/4%20Emotion%20Regulation%20Skills/Client%20Handouts/Sleep%20hygiene/Sleep%20Hygiene%20Tips.pdf>