Riverside Trauma Center

Managing Sleep Disturbances during COVID-19

The current pandemic is causing sleep disruptions for many people. Racing thoughts, nightmares, changes in shifts, schedules, and routines, kids who aren't sleeping are all causing difficulty for many people trying to get enough sleep.

Studies show that poor sleep adversely affects daytime mood and functioning. Persistent insomnia is associated with a higher risk of developing anxiety or depression.

1) Establish a Soothing Pre-Sleep Routine
Ease the transition from wake time to sleep time with a period of relaxing activities an hour or so before bed. It might be helpful to minimize looking at news or other information related to COVID-19 right before bed.

2) Keep Your Internal Clock Set with a Consistent Sleep Schedule
Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day is the very best way to set your clock. This can be particularly difficult with schedules in flux, but can make a big difference.

3) Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol, Nicotine, and Other Chemicals that Interfere with Sleep
Avoid caffeine (found in coffee, tea, chocolate, colas, Mountain Dew, and some pain relievers) for four to six hours before bedtime. Similarly, smokers should refrain from using tobacco products too close to bedtime.

4) Try to Avoid Tossing and Turning for Too Long
If you're not asleep after 20 minutes or wake up in the middle of the night for more than 5-10 minutes, get out of bed, go to another room, and do something relaxing, like reading or listening to music until you are tired enough to sleep.

5) Turn Your Bedroom into a Sleep-Inducing Environment
Try lowering the volume of outside noise with earplugs or a "white noise" appliance. Use heavy curtains, blackout shades, or an eye mask to block light, a powerful cue that tells the brain that it's time to wake up. If you are a clock watcher – hide the clock. Avoid reading, watching TV, or other wakeful activities in bed.

6) Use Light to Your Advantage
Natural light keeps your internal clock on a healthy sleep-wake cycle.

7) Nap Early—Or Not at All
If you must nap, it's better to keep it short and before 5 p.m.

8) Lighten Up on Evening Meals
Finish dinner several hours before bedtime and avoid foods that cause indigestion. Eating healthily throughout the day can also help with sleep.

9) Exercise Early
Exercise helps promote sleep if it is done several hours before sleep.

10) Address nightmares head-on
If you are experiencing nightmares that keep you from staying asleep or make you afraid to fall asleep consider ways of actively addressing them like writing one down and then writing it down and imagining it with a changed ending (for more details see DBT Nightmare Protocol)

11) Follow Through
If your sleep difficulties don't improve, you may want to consult with your physician or a sleep specialist.

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