



Lifestyle tips to improve sleep

This is a strange and unsettling time. Many of our normal patterns are disrupted and it can be hard to sleep.

Here are some lifestyle tips that may help us to get the healthy sleep we need.

Most adults need 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night in order to maximise the restorative benefits for our bodies and minds. Children need more.



Try to go to sleep and wake up at roughly the same time each day. This helps to regulate natural body rhythms. Chose a bedtime when you naturally feel sleepy and aim for at least 8 hours asleep.



Daylight is very important for sleep patterns. Try to get morning daylight (through a window if you can't be outside) and turn down lights in the evening. Avoiding sunglasses in the morning increases our light "dose".



Exercising regularly helps us to get to sleep. However, it's best to avoid exercising in the 2-3 hours before bedtime because increased core body temperature keeps us awake.



Reduce or avoid caffeine and nicotine. These stimulants can last for many hours so coffee (and some colas / tea / chocolates) in the afternoon can make it hard to go to sleep. Smokers often wake early because of nicotine withdrawal.



Try to avoid alcoholic drinks before bedtime. Although alcohol may help us to relax, it keeps us in lighter sleep and reduces important benefits such as dealing with emotions. You also tend to wake in the night when the sedative effect wears off.



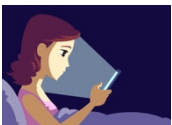
Avoid large meals and excess drinks late at night. They can interfere with our sleep patterns, cause indigestion and wake us up to go to the toilet.



Naps – 20-30 minutes can be beneficial if you don't have the opportunity to have 8 hours sleep at night. However, avoid napping after 3pm or it can be harder to fall asleep later.



Create a restful sleeping environment – a dark, cool, quiet room free from electronic gadgets is ideal. Make sure your bed is comfortable and consider moving noisy pets. Eye masks and ear plugs can be helpful.



The blue light emitted by electronic devices reduces the sleep hormone melatonin and makes it harder to go to sleep. Try to avoid electronic devices (phones, computers etc) for at least an hour before bed.



Acknowledge your worries. In these strange times it's normal to feel unsettled and more worried than usual. The way we choose to respond to the worries can make a big difference to their effect on us. Talking to others, writing things down and grounding ourselves in the moment by noticing what we can see, hear and feel can help. Meditation, mindfulness and yoga can also be useful and many sleep meditations are freely available.



Relax before you try to sleep – a warm bath, music, some meditation or yoga may help to settle your mind and reduce bedtime worrying. The drop in body temperature after a bath or shower also helps to make us sleepy



If you can't sleep, don't lie in bed awake for more than about 20 minutes. Worrying about not getting to sleep can make sleep less likely. Get up and do something relaxing like reading or listening to music until you feel sleepy, then start again.