



GETTING GOOD SLEEP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- **Stressful situations and worrying can impair sleep**
- **Poor sleep can negatively affect mood and daytime functioning when awake**
- **Good sleep quality and quantity is important for the immune system**
- **It's important to maintain good sleep habits throughout uncertain times**

Note: All words that are underlined relate to topics in the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Coronavirus stress and sleep

Coronavirus COVID-19 is a new infection that has spread around the world in recent months. This is a pandemic. This virus is very infectious, so it is easy for it to spread from person to person. To prevent COVID-19 from spreading too quickly and too widely, governments all around the world have placed restrictions on what people can and cannot do. There has also been a lot of media reports about COVID-19 and the associated economic impacts and health effects of this virus.

All of these things can easily make people anxious and stressed. This is natural when there are many unknown factors. Fear and anxiety can cause strong emotions in adults and children, which may result in difficulty sleeping. When our sleep is of a poor quality, or if we cannot get enough sleep, we may not be able to function normally during the day when we are awake.

Sleep is important

Sleep is as important as a healthy diet and exercise. Inadequate sleep can induce and/or make our feelings of anxiety and stress seem worse (see [Anxiety and Sleep](#)). We may not be able to think clearly or make sensible decisions, making it difficult to concentrate at school or work (see [Memory, Thinking and Sleep](#)). We can become upset, angry and irritable more easily. This can all have negative effects on our relationships with family, friends and in our workplaces.

Inadequate sleep can also affect our physical health. When we do not get enough sleep or if our sleep is disrupted this can negatively impact our diet, physical activity levels and even blood pressure levels.

Importantly, sleep helps us fight off infection. When sleep is of poor quality it can impair our immune response. In addition, poor sleep might result in 'flare-ups' of other chronic illness/diseases.

- Sleep is involved in the regulation of immune cells, that is cells that fight off infection.
- People who are sleep deprived have increased risk of contracting a virus when exposed to it.

Getting a good night's sleep

As we try to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important we prioritise our sleep and health.

If worrying about COVID-19 is stopping us from falling asleep, or keeps us awake during the night, there are things that we can do to reduce the worry and improve sleep:

- 1 **Limit media exposure.** Be sensible about what you learn about COVID-19. Check official web sites (such as www.health.gov.au). Do not pay too much attention to gossip and some media reports, which may be exaggerated, or may simply be guessing what might happen.



For other popular helps visit us online at
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

- 2 **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, so that you can go to sleep with a relaxed mind.
- 3 **Take care of your body.** As much as possible keep a normal routine throughout the day. Get some exercise, eat sensibly, do not drink too much alcohol, and avoid caffeine close to bed. Make sure that you do something fun and have a laugh during the day.
- 4 **Connect with others.** If you have specific concerns, try to deal with them before going to bed. Simply talking to some-one you trust about your worries can often help. Get some advice from a trusted person who might be able to help you solve the problem. Social distancing does not need to equate to social isolation.
- 5 **Take care of your mind.** If the worry is still on your mind as you are getting ready to go to sleep, sit down quietly, think about what the issues are and how you might deal with them tomorrow. It may help to write these things down, including a list about what you plan to do about them during the next few days. You may also like to try using a smartphone app called 'Smiling Mind' which has helpful short mindfulness activities to help you relax.
- 6 **Your bed is predominantly for sleep.** You want to achieve a strong connection between your bed and successful sleep (i.e., falling asleep and staying asleep easily). If you go to bed and find that you cannot get to sleep, or if you wake up during the night and cannot get back to sleep because of worries, 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.
- 7 **Keep a regular sleep-wake routine.** As much as possible we should keep a normal sleep 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
- 8 **Managing fatigue.** Also remember that even if you did not get much sleep, or it seemed to be poor sleep, it is not the end of the world. You will get through the next day all right and if you are quite tired, you will probably sleep better the next night. If you are extremely fatigued and sleepy you may need to have a coffee or take a nap to function normally and safely (see [Caffeine and Sleep](#) and [Napping](#) for more information).

Sleep is like a butterfly. You cannot reach out and grab it and catch it. If you stay quiet and still, the butterfly will come to you. It is the same with sleep. You cannot force yourself to go to sleep, so do not try. Simply allow yourself to be relaxed and quiet, and sleep will come to you.

For information on over 70 different sleep related topics, written by professionals, visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au. The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.

More information about sleep

You may also like to check out some of the below Sleep Health Foundation fact sheets that may be helpful in optimising sleep during difficult times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Anxiety and Sleep](#)
- [Good Sleep Habits](#)
- [Preventing Chronic Insomnia](#)
- [Sleep Mistakes](#)
- [Technology and Sleep](#)

If you are required to self-isolate and stay indoors for an extended period, then you can find additional helpful sleep tips at the following link: www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/news/sleep-blog/sleeping-tips-when-staying-indoors-during-isolation-period.html

If you need help

Whether you feel distressed through anticipating a possible emergency or actually recovering from a trauma or loss there are resources to help.

In a mental health crisis, call:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

The Australian Psychological Society has an excellent online resource for coping with COVID-19.

www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf

Beyond Blue has developed a great online resource to help with looking after your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak

If you need additional psychological support, you may also like to speak with a psychologist. You can access a psychologist by asking your GP or using the Australia-wide Find a Psychologist™ service: www.findapsychologist.com.au or call 1800 333 497.



Sleep Health Foundation

114/30 Campbell Street, Blacktown NSW 2148
T: +61 (0) 2 8814 8655 F: +61 (0) 2 9672 3884



www.facebook.com/SleepHealthFoundation

This information is produced by:

Sleep Health Foundation ABN 91 138 737 854

www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

A national organisation devoted to education, advocacy and supporting research into sleep and its disorders.

Disclaimer - Information provided here is general in nature and should not be seen as a substitute for professional medical advice. Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

© Sleep Health Foundation, 2020
Version 1: March 2020