

Coronavirus: How to sleep better during the lockdown

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We are all facing restrictions in a bid to minimise the transmission rate and impact of COVID-19, but there is no denying that life in lockdown is hard.

Being confined to our homes presents an array of challenges, but many people have taken to the web to complain of one particular issue: sleep disturbance.

Good sleep quality is important right now as it helps to maintain a positive mood, contributes to the energy and stamina needed throughout the day, and supports the overall ability to sustain a locked-down life.

In a bid to help the nation catch some much-needed Zs in these difficult times, Loughborough sleep expert Professor Kevin Morgan has shared his five top tips for getting better sleep:

1. Maintain your routines and avoid naps

Routine is the guardian of good sleep, as it helps to keep our body-clock in synch with the 24-hour day, writes Professor Morgan.

Try to maintain your usual bedtimes and rise-times (rise-times are particularly important, as these provide an 'anchor' for your body-clock).

If it's practical, maintain your usual schedules for meals, coffee breaks and work periods.

Mealtimes, in particular, provide your body with important 'time-cues' which keep it in synch with the 24-hour day.

Try to avoid periods of boredom and, unless it was part of your pre-lockdown routine, absolutely avoid napping during the day. For those who find sleeping at night a problem, 'sleepiness' is a valuable resource—don't squander it on naps, save it for bedtime.

2. Exercise

The current guidance allows daily exercise outside the home. Research shows that exercise levels in line with World Health Organization recommendations for cardiovascular health (that is, at least 30 minutes of moderate activity per day at least five times per week) can also improve mood and sleep quality.

Typically, 'moderate activity' could be a brisk walk which raises your pulse-rate (or a bike-ride). But don't forget to maintain social spacing—keep 2 metres from other walkers!

3. Let the light in

Staying indoors keeps us away from sunlight. Strong light helps to synchronise our body-clock by suppressing melatonin—a hormone that begins to rise in darkness as we prepare for sleep.

Try to take your exercise in daylight or, at the very least, sit in your garden or walk to the shops if you can. Even on a dull day, there's a lot of sunlight out there.

By letting your body know it's daytime, it will be less inclined to want to sleep!

Note: melatonin can only be influenced if light hits special cells on your retina—so if you have a sleep problem, and you think light may be the answer, you might want to consider rationing your use of sunglasses.

4. Manage stress

This is a time of worry but try not to take your worries to bed.

I appreciate this is easier said than done, however, a technique that has

proved very useful in therapy is to create a 'worry buffer'.

Simply set some time aside every day (say, 20-30 minutes or so), perhaps in a special quiet place, to focus on the things in your life which are worrying. Try writing them down—and making notes of possible responses or solutions.

Then, at the end of that period, stop. And that's it.

If these worrying thoughts return at night, reassure yourself that they're in-hand, and that you'll return to them tomorrow.

Give yourself permission to go to sleep. There's nothing wrong with worrying—just avoid doing it in bed.

5. Eating and drinking

Diet can affect sleep in a number of ways. In addition to keeping to usual mealtimes, as mentioned in tip one, there are two other useful tips that will help you sleep:

- Be careful how much caffeine you ingest every day—working at home (or just being at home) offers more opportunities for tea and coffee breaks. Caffeine suppresses the chemical adenosine which contributes to sleepiness and promotes sleep.
- Be very careful with [alcohol consumption](#)—above a moderate level, alcohol can certainly help to get us to sleep, but it will also ensure that sleep is lighter, and can lead to early morning awakenings.

Extra: Sleep improvement app

And finally, if you would like to follow-up or build on any of this advice, Loughborough University, in collaboration with the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, has created a sleep improvement app called Sleepful.

The Sleepful self-help programme has been developed through a series of publicly funded research studies and clinical trials in the UK.

It is free to download and is available on Google Play, the Apple App Store and at: www.Sleepful.me.

Provided by Loughborough University

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