Don't let the coronavirus pandemic rob you of your sleep

April 29 2020

If you toss and turn every night because the coronavirus epidemic has

left you anxious and worried, one sleep expert has some advice.

Financial struggles, loss of control, or worries about loved ones can affect peoples' quality and duration of nightly sleep, said sleep psychologist Emerson Wickwire, an associate professor of psychiatry and medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

"We are especially vulnerable to poor sleep during COVID-19, due to spending more time in front of blue light-emitting screens and the loss of traditional daytime structure and schedules," said Wickwire. He is director of the Insomnia Program at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

"An adequate amount of healthy sleep is crucial to help regulate mood, improve brain function, and increase energy and overall productivity. Without enough sleep, our bodies simply cannot function at their best," Wickwire explained in a news release from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM).

It's important to focus on healthy sleep habits during the coronavirus pandemic.

- Get enough sleep. If you're unsure how much sleep you should get, use the AASM's bedtime calculator, which can help identify your appropriate bedtime based on when you need to wake up and your age.
- Maintain a sleep routine. Structure your schedule to support a regular bedtime and wake time. If possible, skip naps.
- Create a comfortable sleep environment: Make sure your bedroom is separated from your work space and is conducive to sleep. Keep the room temperature cool, use an eye mask and try a white noise machine to block noise or distractions.

- Turn off your electronics one hour before bedtime. Leave devices charging away from your bed so you are not tempted to look at stress-inducing news.
- Relax your body before bed. Try meditation or patterned breathing exercises to help relax the mind and prepare the body for restful sleep.
- Try to be positive. Focus on "what is" instead of dwelling on "what if" to reduce stress. Write a gratitude list before bed, and remember to think about and appreciate the small things that can increase happiness and reduce stress.
- Stay connected with supportive friends, family and colleagues who can put worries into perspective.

More information: The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute offers a guide to healthy sleep.

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Citation: Don't let the coronavirus pandemic rob you of your sleep (2020, April 29) retrieved 24 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-dont-coronavirus-pandemic.html

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