

Looking After Our Wellbeing:

A grab pack on the importance of SLEEP during the Covid-19 response

Psychology and Wellbeing Service

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Sleep matters: Advice for parents, children & young people

Difficulties falling asleep affects many people around the world. In fact probably everyone will struggle to fall asleep at some point in their lives. This is especially the case before big events such as an exam, a party or before going on holiday.



A major cause of sleep difficulty is worry. It would not be a surprise then, amidst the Coronavirus pandemic, for sleep problems to increase during this time.

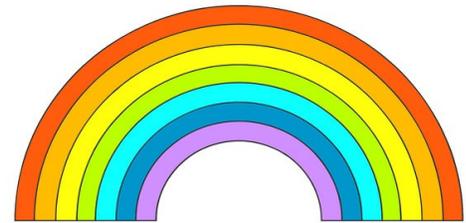
The following strategies are ideas to help improve sleep, collated into the areas of diet / nutrition; the bedroom environment; stress management / relaxation; and routine. Please note that everyone is different and so what is helpful to one

person isn't necessarily helpful to another. At the same time it is sometimes worth persevering with a strategy before discounting it.

If you find after trying these strategies over a period of a few weeks that sleep does not improve then please consult your doctor / gain medical advice.



Whilst the following strategies have been shown to be beneficial, it is far more helpful to use them with an attitude of creating the conditions for rest and sleep, rather than trying to force sleep. We cannot force sleep and the more we try the greater difficulty will arise. Although it feels counter-productive and challenging, we want to change our relationship with sleep problems to being more accepting. Guy Meadows' book (see end) explains this really well.



During this unique time we are all considering the changes we need to make to keep ourselves and our families safe. Check out our range of wellbeing grab packs online, offering helpful tips on a range of subjects including the importance of sleep, parenting children with ADHD, wellbeing for children and many more.

In this grab pack:

- Sleep matters
- Don't force it
- Things to consider for a good sleep pattern:
 - Diet and nutrition
 - The bedroom environment
 - Stress management
 - Relaxation
 - The importance of routines.

Diet and nutrition...

- Cut out stimulants before going to bed (coffee, strong tea, fizzy drinks, energy drinks, hot chocolate). Consider naturally decaffeinated drinks like camomile tea or milk.
- Eating a heavy meal before bed can make it difficult to sleep. However, a light snack can be helpful.
- Eat foods containing tryptophan, which make serotonin, which turns into melatonin – this is found in oats, cottage cheese, milk, chicken, turkey, rice, eggs, beans, spinach and seafood.
- Foods with vitamin B6, B3 and magnesium can help. Bananas contain magnesium.
- Stay clear of foods containing tyrosine (stimulant) – bacon, cured meat, strong cheese, chocolate.



Creating a calm bedroom...

- Make the bedroom and bed as comfortable as possible. Decorate in neutral, calming colours.
- Most people sleep best in a warm bed in a cool room (16-18 degrees).
- In the summer, if the room is too warm, consider using a fan – the 'white noise' can be hypnotic.
- Make the bedroom a screen free zone (computers, TV and mobile phones).
- Make sure toys are covered or stored away to avoid temptation of playing. Consider what's on show – posters can be scary in the dark.
- Blackout blinds can help, particularly in summer.
- If you use a night-light choose one with a soft glow that can be left on all night.

Tips for relaxation

Set aside some time during the day for meditation or relaxation (e.g. progressive muscular relaxation; visualisations).

Relaxation techniques and recordings will usually only work once they have become familiar, so persevere.

Changing focus – backward counting, mindfulness of the breath, 'scategories', etc.

If your child is a worrier set aside time in the day to explore this. Some people write a journal / diary of worries. They can also use this to recognise positive happenings.

The biggest cause of not sleeping is worrying about not sleeping. Therefore, recognising that the body is resting, which is good for the body, even if the mind is still lively.

Avoid negative sleep talk; write positive affirmations.

Classical music in the background can be soothing.

Massage can help some children unwind. Fine motor activities such as jigsaws and colouring can help before bedtime.

Exercise at least 3 times a week. Allow a couple of hours before going to bed after exercise.

Turn the clock round so they / you cannot see it.





Establish a good bedtime routine

Have a warm bath or shower half an hour to one hour before bed.

Avoid day-time naps.

Though some sleep experts recommend it, having a sleep diary can be counter-productive.

Depending on their age, if they are still awake after lying in bed for 20 minutes, they could get up and do something non-stimulating. Keep low lighting.



Why not also try looking at...

www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk

www.sleepio.com

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

www.sleeping.org.uk

www.howdidiyousleep.org

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-sleep-better>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obstructive-sleep-apnoea/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bedwetting/>

'The sleep book: how to sleep well every night' by Guy Meadows

'The effortless sleep method' by Sasha Stephens

'Learn to sleep well' by Chris Idzikowski

'The good sleep handbook' by Nell Card (Ed)

Wake the child at the same time every day to strengthen their body clock. If a teenager, allow weekend lie-ins to be only one or two hours more than normal.

Doing nothing in bed but sleep strengthens the association.

Be consistent when starting a new routine and allow at least 2 weeks to see positive results.

A visual timetable could be used to prepare a child for bedtime approaching.

Write down the routine so that everyone involved is aware.

Say goodnight and leave child to fall asleep by themselves if possible.

Sleep is really important to get right but don't forget there are other ways to look after yourself too. Check out the 5 ways to Wellbeing for more ideas....



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This grab pack is based upon training delivered by The Primary Mental Health Team and Family Nursing.