

Sleeping Well During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Challenges to Sleep During This Time

- Disruption of daily life for all family members
 - Work schedules and job duties have changed drastically for many people. You may be working long hours, different hours, variable shifts, at alternate locations, or not working.
 - Home life and family responsibilities have also changed dramatically. Schooling, child care, shopping, and socializing have all been affected.
- Increased stress, worry, anxiety
 - Most people are confronting multiple major issues, including worries about getting sick, economic concerns, handling work and family responsibilities, and so much that is unknown. Stress-related fatigue can affect memory, concentration, performance, and mood.

Importance of Sleep

Good sleep supports our immune system to stay healthy, helps us manage our mood, and is necessary for performing our jobs and daily tasks safely and efficiently. Despite challenges to sleeping well during the current crisis, there are a number of steps you can take to promote better sleep during this time.

General Sleep Guidelines

- Try to keep the same bedtime and rise time every day, particularly the rise time.
 - During the day it may help to make a regular schedule to block off time for work, exercise, and play
- Avoid caffeine 6-8 hour before your planned bedtime.
- Limit alcohol to one per day, and try to have it earlier in the evening.
- Avoid routine napping. If a nap is necessary, keep the nap to 30 minutes and have it no later than 6-8 hours before your planned bedtime.
- Keep the bedroom quiet, dark, and cool.
- Reserve your bed for sleep, not for work, watching TV, or other wakeful activities.
- Exercise regularly, but avoid exercise 2 hours before your planned bedtime.
- Try to spend some time outside in natural light, especially in the morning, as this will help regulate your body's clock. Open drapes, blinds, shades to let light inside.

If you have difficulty sleeping - In addition to the above . . .

- Schedule a “wind-down” time before bedtime.
- Avoid using an iPad, tablet, or computer one hour before bedtime. The blue light emitted from these screens can delay the release of melatonin and delay the body's internal clock, making it difficult to fall asleep. Device settings that filter out the blue light can help, but may not be optimal. Reading in a chair with a book light is a better option.
- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, quiet reading.
 - Try simple meditation by breathing normally while thinking one word on inhale and one word on exhale, repeatedly (like in and out or one and two). When your mind gets distracted, gently bring your mind back to the breathing and words. Be aware that this happens repeatedly for everyone.
- Do not get into bed unless feeling sleepy (for example, eyelids heavy, feeling mentally cloudy)
- If you wake up during the night, try simple meditation as described above
- If that doesn't work after 20-30 minutes, get out of bed and read in a chair using just a book light. Return to bed when feeling sleepy.

If working shift work or long hours:

- Try to maintain a routine – make time for sleep even if working odd hours
- Try to take breaks when feasible.
- Take naps whenever you can. Sleeping for 20-40 minutes can increase alertness for the following 4 hours
- Use caffeine judiciously, generally no more than 2-3 cups. It's best to avoid caffeine within 6 hours before anticipated sleep time.
- Do not drive when sleepy. Consider letting someone drive your like Uber, Lyft, family member, or a friend.
- If you are sleeping during the day, consider eye mask and ear plugs during sleep to reduce disruption.
- If possible, delegate non-work responsibilities to someone else.

If not working or working from home:

Often, the daily routines of getting kids off to school and the commute to work shorten your opportunity for sleep. Take advantage of this time to try to obtain a full 7-8 hours of sleep at the same time every day. Our bodies and brains like regularity!

- Try to avoid late night TV and screen bingeing (phone, tablet, laptop, tv, games).
- Avoid snacking all day, and limit daily alcohol consumption.
- Allow time to connect with others remotely and regularly.
- Don't hibernate - try to get fresh air by going for a walk routinely.
- If you have extra time during the day that you normally do not have, think of ways you might be able to help out friends, family, or co-workers who are working longer hours.

Sleep and Mood

- Good sleep improves your ability to manage stress
- Anxiety is physical and mental arousal - anxiety can be the cause and the result of insomnia
- Insomnia can be the cause and the result of anxiety
- Poor sleep increases the risk of suicide, and this risk increases with additional issues such as money problems, pain and health problems, and social isolation
- Regular exercise improves mood: it reduces anxiety, depression, and stress!
- Protect your mental health by:
 - writing in a journal to process your feelings
 - set aside time for relaxation – quiet time to slow down your mind (consider simple meditation described above)
 - connect with people using remote connections
 - many therapists have the option of meeting virtually, so consider contacting one through St. Luke's Employee Assistance Program or psychotherapystlouis.org

REMEMBER: More sleep improves your immunity, your mood, your performance, and your HEALTH

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For more information of self-care visit, the St. Luke's intranet COVID-19 page, Team Member Support and Wellness Resources