

Sleeping well during the pandemic

How well are you sleeping during the pandemic?

We know from listening to lots of local people, and from our own team members, good sleep is alluding many at the moment, maybe even the majority of us?



Why you may not be sleeping well?

When we are confronted with anxiety, our bodies undergo several changes and enter a special state called the fight-or-flight response. Preparing to either fight or flee a perceived danger.

It is common to experience a blank mind, increased heart rate, sweating, tense muscles and more - unfortunately, these responses do little good when it comes to protecting us from the pandemic or modern sources of anxiety. What these do, however, is make it harder to establish routines and some of the other important ways of helping us to cope with the current situation.

In the past we may have been used to having uninterrupted night's sleep - to recharge our batteries. Now living with the anxiety arising from this pandemic, we find it's harder to get to sleep and this affects how we feel. We may end up feeling frustrated and angry about lost sleep. These feelings of frustration and the tiredness can make life even more difficult to manage.

Whilst in the short term a lack of sleep may simply be a frustration, it may also become established, leading to the potential for other health issues as we return to some of the pressures of modern life.

What can we do to help ourselves?

Here is some information to help with understanding and trying different approaches for supporting a return to more restful sleep.

Surprisingly, we all wake up for a very short time about 12 times during an eight-hour sleep. Most times we are not even aware we are awake unless we feel thirsty or need the loo. The most helpful thing we can do is to plan to get into a regular pattern. No matter how strange the pattern, once we set it up, our bodies try to keep it the same.

There are no rights or wrongs about sleep, and we are all different with our own pattern. It's the pattern of sleep that matters. We might feel our pattern is unhelpful, if we are wide awake across the middle of the night and then fast asleep when the alarm goes off, perhaps.



What can we do to get a more helpful sleep routine?

- Don't just lie there, do something
- Get into a routine before bedtime
- Avoid caffeine (including chocolate)
- Try a Muscle Relaxation technique
- Listen to soothing music
- Medication (including herbal and over the counter) to re-establish a sleep pattern
- Listen to the radio (with a timer)
- Use Aromatherapy - for example lavender pillow spray
- Take a warm bath
- Have a warm drink
- Use a distraction technique
- Use helpful self-talk
- Rather than change position use breathing/relaxation technique



Why not ask yourself if your room is set-up for sleeping. Research suggests for most people technology should not be in the room (as the light and noise disrupts sleep). However, for some using a sleep app works well.

If you are worried about forgetting something important - keeping a notepad and pen at the side of the bed to jot down your thoughts can be helpful, as this subconsciously gives you the reassurance that its written down so can't be forgotten.

Today will become a historical period in time, and writing your thoughts and experiences, along with notes of what is happening around the world and in the UK before attempting to sleep may provide a useful new routine to aid your pattern of sleep.

Deep breathing

It's natural to take long, deep breaths when relaxed. However, during the fight-or-flight response, breathing becomes rapid and shallow.

Deep breathing reverses, this and sends messages to our brain to begin calming the body. It also has the benefit of exercising our lungs.

1

Breathe in slowly. Count (in your head or get someone to count for you) and make sure the inward breath lasts at least 5 seconds.

Pay attention to the feeling of the air filling your lungs.

2

Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds (again, keep count).

You don't want to feel uncomfortable, but it should last quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath.

3

Breathe out very slowly for 5 to 10 seconds.

Pretend like you're breathing through a straw to slow yourself down. Try using a real straw to practice.

4

Repeat the breathing process until you feel calm.

This normally doesn't take too long, but don't worry if it seems to take you a bit longer.

Gratitude

It is so easy to get into the habit of ignoring all the things that are going well and focus only on the things that are not. There is a simple technique which allows us to move away from the negative things and onto the positive things, called 'counting blessings' or 'saying thanks'.

Research has shown that people who write a 'blessings' list complain less about their health, feel more attentive, energetic, determined and more satisfied with life. For some they feel more connected to other people, more willing and able to give help and support to others, building supportive social networks and friendships along the way.

Why not have a go? These can be really small or very big things. Some suggestions:

- Listening to my favourite music
- The sun shone today
- I saw a lovely bird in the garden
- I have supportive parents
- Going for a walk in the park
- My lovely children
- A friend called me
- My fabulous grandchildren
- Looking forward to my birthday
- Doing well at work

You can share this exercise with family or with friends and is a great way to develop social networks and support.



What to do, if your sleeping is having a real impact on your health?

Chronic sleep deprivation has the potential to lead to some long-term health problems, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure or stroke. Prolonged lack of sleep can disrupt our immune system, so we could become less able to fend off bugs.

If you find these suggested tips not working and are worried about your continued lack of sleep, you can contact your local GP surgery.

Doctors are now able to offer consultations by video, they can explore options with you during a telephone consultation or may invite you for a face-to-face appointment at a practice for patients without COVID symptoms.



Other sources of sleep information

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm>

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/sleeping-tips>

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