

# Sleep and social isolation

Nowhere to go, alarming news all around and free access to the kettle can wreak havoc with our sleep. Here are some tips for keeping it in hand.

## 1. Keep a routine

Sleep is mainly about routine. Going to sleep and more importantly waking at the same time everyday is key. Even if there is no school or other activities to go to, choose a wake-up time and stick to it. Set alarms and get someone to encourage you out of bed (especially if you like hitting the snooze button). If you are self-isolating (and well enough to get up) then try putting an alarm on the other side of the room.

Our circadian rhythm (biological clock) is very depending on this regularity so naps (any longer than 30mins) and lie ins just mess it up.

## 2. Daylight

Our biological clock is also set by daylight. During the day make sure the curtains are open and try and get some light especially in the morning. If you can try and go for a walk, stand outside or stare out of the window for 20-30mins (not necessarily all at once if it's boring). Even on a cloudy day, there will be enough light to rejig your body clock and improve your mood. Try looking out for birds or a rare plane or another creative game. Obviously don't stare directly at the sun as this is bad for your eyes.

## 3. Exercise

Tiring your self out physically can get rid of excess energy especially if it is nervous energy and help you drop off later at bedtime. If you exercise late at night e.g. after 8pm, your body will need some time for your pulse rate etc to go down before you fall asleep.

## 4. Worries and stress

Talk about your worries to other people around you, supportive adults and friends. If the news or the chat on social media is making you panic more or tends to stick in your mind with what ifs then have a break, watch something else, play a game with your friends, send a meme or a joke. This is especially true if you are catching up before bedtime.

At night, write your worries or to do lists down for dealing with in the morning. Play some music, listen to an audiobook if that helps or try download some guided relaxation or sleep sounds. There are lots of free apps available.

If you are waking too early filled with worries that won't go away then get up, have a drink of water, do something distracting for a little while then try go back to sleep if it's still sleep time.

Don't worry about being tired later in the day, studies show that your body is very resistant to a few nights reduced sleep (especially if you are a teenager) and will catch up eventually.

If your worries are so bad that you don't feel safe, wake someone to help you.

## **5. Keep bed for sleeping**

One of the sleep cues your body clock will use is getting into bed and snuggling down. This is hard when you are self-isolating or in lockdown as your bedroom is often your work or study area as well as the place where you meet your friends or family on social media.

When you get up, make your bed and try to work at a desk if possible or sit on the bed so you use your room differently during the day.

## **6. Reduce the effects of blue light from screens at night**

The blue light from screens can block the release of melatonin which is the natural hormone that controls your body clock.

If you are using a screen in the evening, have another light on in the room and keep glancing away from the screen. Keep the screen at least 50cm or arm's length away from you if you have long arms (not easy for phone but better for laptops, tablets and TV's).

Download a UV or blue light reducing app that prepares your device for night-time use. Search 'blue light filter' in your app store.

## **7. Stop Caffeine after 2pm**

Caffeine stays in your system for up to 8 hours. If you stop drinking caffeine by 2pm it will be out of your system by 10pm and will not affect you falling asleep.

Remember that there is caffeine in coffee, tea, a lot of cola drinks and energy drinks. Dark chocolate and green tea has less and even decaf coffee still has a little caffeine.