Improving your sleep

There are a lot of things that can easily make people anxious and stressed. This is natural when there are unknown factors in your way. Fear and anxiety can cause strong emotions, which may result in difficulty sleeping. When our sleep is poor, or we cannot get enough sleep, we may not function normally during the day when awake.

Sleep is important

When it comes to mental health, good sleep, a healthy diet and exercise are all critically important. Inadequate sleep can make our feelings of anxiousness and stress seem worse.

A lack of sleep may make it difficult to think clearly or make sensible decisions and make it difficult to concentrate. We can become angry, and irritable more easily.

Poor or insufficient sleep can also affect our general health and can negatively impact our diet and physical activity levels. Importantly, sleep helps us fight off infection as our immune system is impacted when we have poor sleep.

The sleep cycle is very complex and the impacts on our immune system is of vital significance to reduce the risk of illness and infection.

How do I get a good night's sleep?

If you are concerned about your mental health or not, it is important we prioritise our sleep and health. If sleep is an issue, there are a number of things that you can do during this time:

1. **Limit media exposure –** Keep up to date but try to limit your exposure. If you want to get news, make sure it is from a valid source. See our flyer on Getting the Facts Straight. Try to avoid exposure to media late in the evening.
2. **Relax –** At night, make sure you watch or read something that is not related to COVID-19. This is especially important in the 2 hours before going to sleep, so that you can go to sleep with a relaxed mind.
3. **Look after yourself –** Focus on getting a regular routine, some exercise, eat well, don't drink too much alcohol, and avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening. Importantly, do something that you like each day.
4. **Keep connected –** Try not to go to bed with unresolved issues. Talking to someone about your worries can often help and often solve them. You need to remain socially connected while physically distancing.
5. **Look after your brain, be mindful –** We are all worried at this time, that is normal. Practicing mindfulness can be beneficial and there are some simple Apps to practice mindfulness that can help you relax and facilitate better sleep.
6. **Use your bed for sleep –** Your bed should be for sleep. Try to avoid watching TV in bed and don't use phones while in bed. If you cannot get to sleep or wake up and cannot get back to sleep – get up, in a dim light and do something relaxing like reading a book. When you feel tired again go back to bed.
7. **Be routine –** Going to bed at the same time each night, and getting up at the same time each morning is important. Also try to get outside in the morning as it can help to regulate the melatonin in the body to support your natural bodies regulation.
8. **Managing fatigue –** Having a bad nights sleep is not uncommon. It is likely that the next night you will sleep better. If this continues for a long period try not to have daytime naps as this can be bad for your routine. Try to stay awake till a reasonable hour in the evening as falling asleep early due to fatigue, may mean you wake overnight more often too.

It is difficult to get the balance right- following these tips and ideas may help to improve your sleep but it can take some time, particularly if your mental health is affected. If you still are unable to sleep after trying all these steps, you may need to speak to someone or visit your GP. Take your sleep and mental health seriously.

Some mindfulness tools to try

1. ABC iview Mindfulness Toolkit for kids and adults
2. Smiling Mind App - Thrive Inside
3. Calm Mindfulness App

Where to get help if you think you need it?

If you think you need help and are not coping, here are some links and numbers to contact. Reaching out is winning, it should not be considered defeat:

- **SANE Australia** (people living with a mental illness)
  Phone: 1800 18 7263
- **Beyond Blue** (anyone feeling depressed or anxious)
  Phone: 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- **Black Dog Institute** (people affected by mood disorders)
  Online help
- **Lifeline** (anyone having a personal crisis)
  Phone: 13 11 14 or chat online
- **Suicide Call Back Service** (anyone thinking about suicide)
  Phone: 1300 659 467

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