

Improving sleep for teens (and adults too)

COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing resources



What this fact sheet covers:

- Why sleep is important
- Tip to improve sleep
- Online tools that can help

Getting a good night's sleep can be challenging at the best of times. In the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak we find ourselves in an unprecedented situation, so it is understandable that many people will be feeling more worried or anxious than usual. Increased distress can significantly impact sleep, so if you or your children are experiencing sleepless nights, you are probably not alone.

The points below have been designed for parents to help support their children (12-18) to sleep well, but the guidance will be helpful for adults, too.

Why is sleep important?

Sleep serves several important functions which are necessary for human survival. The first function relates to the physical need for our bodies to rest. The body requires periods of sleep to grow muscle, repair tissue and synthesise hormones.

The second function is about cognition and helping to consolidate memories. During the day, we are faced with lots of information that can't all be retained. At night while we sleep, our

brains work to process and store information from the day, moving some parts of "data" from our short-term memory stores into stronger, more stable, long term memories. This process is called memory consolidation.

How might Coronavirus be affecting sleep?

When it comes to sleep issues, the main disturbances include difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or waking up too early. A shift in your circadian rhythm, which usually results in going to bed very late, like 2am, and then have trouble waking up in the morning, can also be an issue.

People who have difficulty falling asleep or getting back to sleep after they wake during the night are often kept up by worries and unhelpful thoughts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty and disrupted usual routines including sporting activities, work and school. As a result many young people and adults are experiencing higher levels of worry and anxiety which can affect sleep.



The good news is that some simple strategies that can be used to manage general worries can also be used at night to help calm the mind and turn down the volume on the worries that might be preventing sleep.

So, what can I do to help my child and I sleep well?

Step 1 - Make sure that you are having open and honest discussions with your child about Coronavirus to address their concerns. Keep them informed, but don't overwhelm them with unnecessary details about the pandemic.

It's important to normalise their experience and let them know you are happy to chat to them about this. Download our [fact sheet on reassuring young people about the unknown](#).

Step 2 - Limit screen time in the evenings and keep phones out of bedrooms. This reduces the risk of increasing stimulation before bedtime, particularly as it relates to information and potentially misinformation about Coronavirus circulating on the internet and social media.

Step 3 - Implement an evening routine that is predictable and involves a calm routine just before bed. The hour before bed is critically important – having a wind down routine helps prepare the body and mind for sleep.

This routine might involve putting away all devices, turning off screens (including the TV), having a bath or shower, spending quiet time with siblings or pets, doing meditation or relaxation activities or reading a good book.

Step 4 - Use bedrooms and beds only for sleeping where possible. This will strengthen both the mental association of children and adults between the bedroom being a calming place for sleep.

Are there any interventions available?

If you or your child is experiencing a lot of difficulty sleeping to the point of it interfering with the ability to function during the day, cognitive behaviour therapy strategies for insomnia can be useful.

These can be delivered face-to-face by mental health professionals. Due to Coronavirus, sessions are now being offered by telehealth digital formats to limit social contact. You'll need to get in touch with a GP first to get a referral to a psychologist.

For young people, researchers at the Black Dog Institute have developed an app called Sleep Ninja to help improve sleep. It's not yet available to the public because it's going through it's final testing phase. However, a study involving about 300 young people is underway and your child may be eligible to participate. The trial is all done remotely – no contact needed.

To participate, they'll need to be aged 12-16, located in Australia and have a smartphone. [For more information please click here](#).

For adults, we recommend the online program called [Sleepio](#) which is supported by research.

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Written by:

Dr Aliza Werner-Seidler
Clinical Psychologist and Senior Research Fellow, Black Dog Institute

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