

Wellness Wednesday



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How To Sleep Better If Coronavirus Anxiety Is Keeping You Awake

Experiencing insomnia during the pandemic? Stress dreams? This expert advice is for you.

Americans don't get enough sleep when we're not in the middle of a pandemic. But as the spread of coronavirus continues to impact our jobs, our finances and our well-being, it's more important than ever to establish or maintain good sleep habits, which help the body fight off viruses and stay healthy.

"You need your respiratory system working optimally. You need your immune system working optimally, and the only way that is going to happen is if your brain is going through healthy stages of sleep without interruption," Lauri Leadley, sleep coach and founder of Valley Sleep Center, told HuffPost.

Of course, that's easier said than done. The extreme stress caused by the coronavirus pandemic naturally is leading to a lot of sleepless nights. Thankfully, there are plenty of easy things to do to help you sleep better and reduce the amount of time you toss and turn.

Below, doctors and sleep specialists gave us tips for a better night's rest right now:

Enjoy natural light during the day.

Studies suggest that exposure to natural light helps our bodies stick to a consistent sleep schedule. While it may be harder to physically get outside in the current climate, there are ways to embrace the sunlight from the comfort of your own home, too.

"Try to get as much natural light exposure as you can during the day. If working from home, position yourself near a window, and if possible, get outside for a midday socially distanced walk," said Sabra M. Abbott, an assistant professor of neurology at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.



Take a hot shower or bath before bed.

This relaxing act primes your brain for sleep by naturally triggering the release of melatonin. Bump up the impact by using lavender scented epsom salts for total relaxation.

"In order to initiate sleep and maintain sleep, our bodies need a rise in melatonin. The best way to achieve a rise in melatonin is a decrease in body temperature," Leadley said. "One of the ways we can help make our melatonin levels rise is by taking a hot shower or a hot bath before bed. When you get out of the shower or out of the bath, your body temperature will drop and therefore melatonin will rise."

Connect with others.

Even though we're practicing social distancing, don't actually stop being social.

"Find a way to stay connected despite physical distancing," said Indira Gurubhagavatula, an associate professor of clinical medicine at the division of sleep medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Crescenz VA Medical Center in Philadelphia. "We are meant to be social. Connection and communication are important ways of defusing stress so that we don't take these worries and concerns to bed with us."

Move your body at least once a day.

"Getting exercise daily is a really good idea. Just because we are stuck in the house doesn't mean we can't move around," said Ilene Rosen, an assistant dean for graduate medical education at the University of Pennsylvania and former president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

You don't have to sweat buckets to reap the benefits, either. Just moving your body slightly is enough to improve your sleep.

"In an ideal world, if you're in a place where the weather is good, you would get in a brisk walk," Rosen said. "For someone who is having trouble sleeping, a great way to remind your internal clock that it's time to be awake is to take a brisk walk in the morning, before noon or 1 p.m."



Stick to a consistent sleep schedule.

You may feel tempted to sleep in or stay up late right now, but don't give in. Doctors recommend waking up with your normal work alarm and going to bed at your usual bedtime to help your body keep its sleep routine.

"Maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule," Abbott said. "Even though regular daily activities may be disrupted, your body does best with a routine and will sleep better if you continue to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day."

Start a "worry" book.

There are plenty of reasons you feel stressed right now. It's natural for your brain to reflect on them as you crawl in bed, but try to override that habit by dumping those thoughts in a journal instead.

"It's a good idea to write things down in a worry book. Get a little notebook and more than three hours before bed, try to plan out the list of things you want to get done the next day, Rosen said. "Also, if you have specific worries or concerns, this is a good place to do a little journaling about them."

Limit your screen time before bed and while you're in bed.

Screen time has substantially increased during COVID-19, thanks to remote work, virtual happy hours, digital news updates and endless social media scrolling required to pass the time. This is understandable, but try to exercise boundaries when you can for the sake of your sleep.

"Avoid electronics for at least one to two hours before bedtime," Gurubhagavatula said, noting that the bright blue light of devices makes you more alert. "Dim light in the evenings helps the secretion of melatonin, which signals that sleep will follow. Melatonin levels rise during the night, so we stay asleep even as our sleep 'hunger' begins to wear off."

And if your stress dreams jolt you awake during the night, try to resist reaching for your phone, Gurubhagavatula added. That will only make your sleep worse.

Curb your alcohol intake.

As pandemic anxiety grows, Americans are drinking more and more; alcohol sales are up 55% compared to this time last year. That wine may feel like a vital part of your social distancing practice, but your sleep schedule will likely disagree.



"A lot of people are using alcohol to self-medicate their anxiety, particularly to help them fall asleep — and that is really bad," Rosen said. "While it might work for falling asleep faster, it is also associated with increased wake after sleep onset. So, it could make you fall asleep faster but fragment your sleep."



EGG TOMATO AND SCALLION SANDWICH



213 Calories | *PREP TIME: 15 mins* | *COOK TIME: 0 mins* | *TOTAL TIME: 15 mins*
YIELD: 1 Servings | *COURSE: Breakfast, Brunch, Lunch* | *CUISINE: American*

INGREDIENTS

100 calorie sandwich roll, deli thin flats
1 tbsp chopped scallions
1 large Hard Boiled Egg, sliced
1 tbsp light mayonnaise
1 thick slice ripe tomato
salt and fresh cracked pepper to taste

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 sandwich, Calories: 213kcal, Carbohydrates: 21g, Protein: 13.5g, Fat: 9.5g, Saturated Fat: 2g, Cholesterol: 189mg, Sodium: 363mg, Fiber: 5.5g, Sugar: 5g
Source: Skinnytaste.com

This sandwich is inexpensive and easy to make. You can make it a day ahead if you want to pack it to eat on the go! Sounds too simple, right? Well try it, and you will see why it is so addicting!

TIP: Keep hard boiled eggs in your refrigerator for a quick breakfast on the go, to add to sandwiches or even salads. It only takes a few minutes to boil a handful of eggs.



INSTRUCTIONS



If possible, boil older eggs first. Fresh eggs are harder to peel once hard boiled. Sliced hard boiled eggs, juicy ripe tomatoes, chopped scallions with a touch of mayonnaise, salt and pepper – enjoy this sandwich for breakfast or lunch. Serve it open-faced on a slice of sour-dough bread!

You can make the sandwiches the night before and wrap them tight with plastic for quick and easy breakfast to go.

HOW TO MAKE

Sliced hard boiled eggs, juicy ripe tomatoes, chopped scallions with a touch of mayonnaise, salt and pepper – enjoy this sandwich for breakfast or lunch.

FEATURED EXERCISE

FREE Killer Leg Workout You Can Do Anywhere



You don't need to do a bunch of crazy exercises to get a great leg workout. The best killer leg workout is one that contains basic exercises. Simple as that!

Try The Staggered Stance Deadlift

This deadlift has you standing with your feet staggered a bit. Why? This allows you to lift heavier than a single-leg deadlift because you're more stable, while still challenging one side at a time and giving you the chance to improve any imbalances you have.

- Stand with feet hip-width apart with a weight by each foot.
- Place one foot a foot-length in front of the other so your stance is staggered.
- Hinge at your hips and bend your knees to lower your body.
- Grab each weight with your arms straight.
- Push your butt far back and keep your back flat. Your torso should be almost parallel to the floor.
- Keeping your core tight, push through your heels to stand up straight. Keep the weights close to your shins as you pull up.
- Pause at the top and squeeze your butt, then slowly lower the weight back to the floor. 12 reps each side.



<https://www.self.com/gallery/deadlift-variations>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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