

Want to sleep like a baby during the coronavirus crisis? Here are 10 ways to do it

14 May 2020, by Faustin Etindele



A good quality sleep of a sufficient duration is essential to being able to function well both physically and mentally. Credit: Shutterstock

The crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a generalized climate of anxiety, which has increased stress levels and which can lead to insomnia even in people who do not usually suffer from it. While it is true that good sleep is essential to health in normal times, it becomes even more so in this period of confinement.

Sleep is a [natural recurrent state of unconsciousness](#) from the outside world, accompanied by a progressive decrease in muscle tone that occurs at regular intervals.

The average human spends one-third of their life sleeping. Sleeping well is essential [for many good reasons](#). Sleep of good quality and of sufficient duration is essential to being mentally and physically functional.

Conversely, [poor sleep](#) can gradually put a person at risk. Lack of sleep, whether or not it is caused by a physiological or behavioral disorder, increases [obesity](#), reduces [immunity](#), [impairs job performance](#), [memory](#) and [many other functions](#).

In my research in [sleep medicine](#) and social

epidemiology, I analyze [sleep disorders](#) in atypical cases, such as people with Parkinson's disease, call center and [customer service workers](#).

Here are 10 recommendations to promote sleep, based on both my observations and the scientific literature:

- 1. Establish a regular schedule.** Regular bedtime and wake-up times will help you maintain a healthy sleep routine.
- 2. Keep in contact with natural light.** Open your windows and expose yourself to sunlight as much as possible. This can be good for improving your mood and [regulating your body clock](#). In addition, it is an opportunity to get some fresh air in a controlled manner for a short period of time.
- 3. Maintain daily physical activity.** Staying active during social distancing helps you build up enough body fatigue to fall asleep more easily and [get a deeper sleep](#).
- 4. Limit naps.** Unless you have had very little sleep the previous night, it is important to avoid sleeping during the day or in the afternoon, as this reduces [sleep pressure](#) and increases the risk of [insomnia](#).
- 5. Maintain a social life.** Bad news in the media can create anxiety. It is important to use [your online social networks](#) to seek support from friends and family to keep your spirits up and maintain your mental health. This is especially important when living alone or away from family.
- 6. Be disciplined in your diet.** Avoid drinking coffee in the afternoon as it can cause nervousness and delay sleep in the evening. Eating [large, overly rich meals](#) before going to bed can also delay sleep. Some people have no problem sleeping, even if they drink a lot of coffee and eat a lot. It is nevertheless recommended to control the quantities and times of consumption during the day

because anything in excess may harm sleep.

7. Avoid backlit devices before bedtime. [New technologies](#) are an integral part of our lives and we're all a little addicted to our smartphones, tablets and laptops. It is absolutely important to set them aside at least 30 minutes before your scheduled sleep time. If you're worried you won't be able to do that, you can set the device to "night mode" to reduce its brightness. By reducing the brain's lag with the natural cycle of day and night, this will prevent disturbances in the biological clock and will be beneficial for the [quality of sleep](#) in the long term.

8. Avoid staying in bed if you don't sleep. The brain is like a computer, which associates certain events with certain functions. The brain will associate bed and darkness with sleep and trigger the whole process of falling asleep. The brain will not be able to do this if it is distracted by other activities such as video games, homework, physical activity and alcohol. It is best to read a book, listen to soft music, do deep breathing exercises or [yoga](#), or any other relaxing activity. Do not stay in bed for more than half an hour after going to bed if you are not sleeping. When sleep is delayed, it is best to get out of bed, do a quiet activity, and return to bed only when signs of fatigue—heavy eyelids, yawning, etc.—appear.

9. Accept that not all our nights of sleep are perfect or restful. We are all subject to stress and each of us has our own stress management techniques. We must avoid worrying if we haven't slept well for a few days. Before you get upset about poor sleep, I suggest you review the eight recommendations above. Often, people have trouble sleeping because of a trivial problem, an argument with a loved one, or work-related anxiety. Identifying your stress and learning how to manage it is a good start.

10. Avoid sleeping pills. Generally, the easy solution is the one that carries the most risk. Prolonged use of sleep aids, such as benzodiazepines or anxiolytics, without consulting health-care professionals [could worsen a situation](#) that was not initially serious. It is better to adopt a healthy lifestyle than to resort to medication, both in

normal situations and during confinement due to COVID-19.

Remember that to be able to work effectively, eat healthily, have fun, pay bills and take care of your loved ones, in normal times or during periods of confinement, you need to [sleep](#) well!

More information: Correction note:

This is an updated version of a story originally published May 13, 2020. The earlier story made reference to the author's research on sleep disorders experienced by people who play video games. The story linked to a study published by the academic journal "*Scientific Reports*." That journal has subsequently retracted its article after concerns were raised about the research on video gamers. This updated story removes the reference to video gamers and the link to the article in "*Scientific Reports*."

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APA citation: Want to sleep like a baby during the coronavirus crisis? Here are 10 ways to do it (2020, May 14) retrieved 11 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-baby-coronavirus-crisis-ways.html>

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