

Top tips for better sleep during lockdown

A guide for young people, developed by
Bury North Youth Team
(Newmarket, Suffolk)



Introduction

We hope this guide finds you well at this difficult time.

Many of us are experiencing difficulties sleeping at the moment. This might include finding it hard to fall asleep and finding it hard to stay asleep.

This guide will introduce some top tips to help get your sleep back on track, including; “quick wins” for good sleep, tips for making sleep more automatic, ways to deal with anxiety at night, soothing skills, and some ideas of how to stay active during the day.

We hope that you find it helpful.

If you have any questions, please contact your care coordinator who will be able to provide you with further information.

What happens when our sleep pattern changes?

We are experiencing a lot of changes to our daily lives at the moment and for many of us, this means we are spending more time at home with fewer activities to complete.

Loss of structure and routine during the day can result in a loss of structure and routine for our sleep.

When we are experiencing a period of poor sleep we tend to see changes in our mood and our behaviour.

We might feel:

- More anxious or worried than usual
- Down and low
- Irritable
- Like our emotions are more unpredictable

And as a result of this we might:

- Lack motivation and energy to do things
- Find activities we used to enjoy less fun
- Spend more time in bed



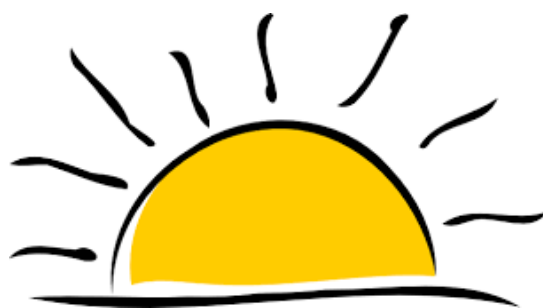
What drives sleep?

Our sleep is influenced by three factors:

Our body clock:

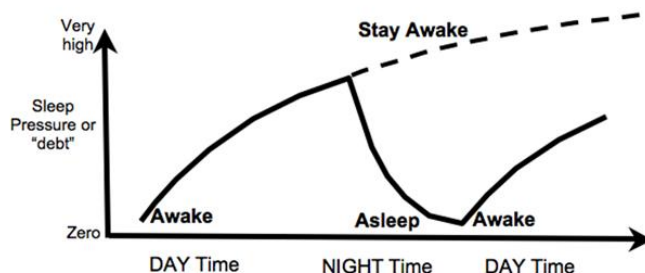
A 24 hour cycle that is in sync with our external environment i.e. sunrise and sunset.

The hormones in our brain that control our sleep/wake cycles respond to light levels. In darkness, our brain releases a hormone that induces sleep.



Our sleep drive:

The more tired we are, the more likely we are to sleep. During the day we build up a pressure to sleep by keeping active and preventing ourselves from napping.



Association between bed and sleep:

Our brain is very good at creating associations between objects and responses and learns that bed = sleep. The association between bed and sleep can be strengthened by only using bed for sleep and not for other activities such as watching TV, playing games or completing work.



Quick wins for good sleep

Certain lifestyle and environmental factors can confuse our brain and our body clock and make it hard for us to know that it is time to go to sleep.

Lifestyle factors

- **Limiting caffeine/nicotine:**

Caffeine (e.g. tea/coffee, fizzy drinks, chocolate) and nicotine (cigarettes) act as stimulants, meaning that they cause us to feel more awake and alert. Where possible, avoid caffeine and nicotine for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed.



- **Limiting alcohol:**

Although alcohol can sometimes reduce the time it takes for us to fall asleep, it greatly reduces our quality of sleep, causing us to wake up feeling tired and like we haven't slept. Where possible, avoid drinking alcohol before going to bed.

- **Managing diet:**

Feeling hungry when going to bed can be distracting and prevent us from being able to relax. Having a light snack before bed can prevent feelings of hunger from keeping us awake at night, however, eating a big meal just before going to bed can be just as disruptive for our sleep as going to bed hungry.



- **Managing exercise:**

Keeping active during the day can help us to build our sleep drive so that we feel tired in the evening, making it easier for us to fall asleep. However, strenuous exercise (e.g. going for a run or completing a workout video) just before we go to bed can wake us up and cause us to become alert. Where possible, avoid strenuous exercise for at least 4 hours before going to bed.

Quick wins for good sleep continued

Environmental factors



- **Limiting noise:**

Trying to fall asleep in a noisy environment can be really difficult, especially when there are loud or unexpected noises. Loud noises cause our mind and body to become alert, making it hard for us to relax and fall asleep. If you have earplugs these can be helpful for blocking out background noise or if you have headphones try listening to soothing music or an audiobook.

- **Limiting light:**

Our brains release a sleep hormone when the sun goes down and our exposure to light is reduced, therefore an ideal sleeping environment is one which is dark. If you find darkness anxiety provoking, try using a small nightlight or leave a light on in the room/hallway outside of your bedroom door.

- The blue light from mobile phones and TV screens can trick our brain into thinking that it is daytime and confuse our body clock. Where possible, minimise the use of electronics when you are in bed or use night-mode screen options.



- **Temperature:**

You are likely to find it easier to fall asleep in a cooler bedroom with blankets/bedding to keep you warm, than in a bedroom that is too warm. If you have a window in your room, try letting a blast of fresh air through before you get into bed.

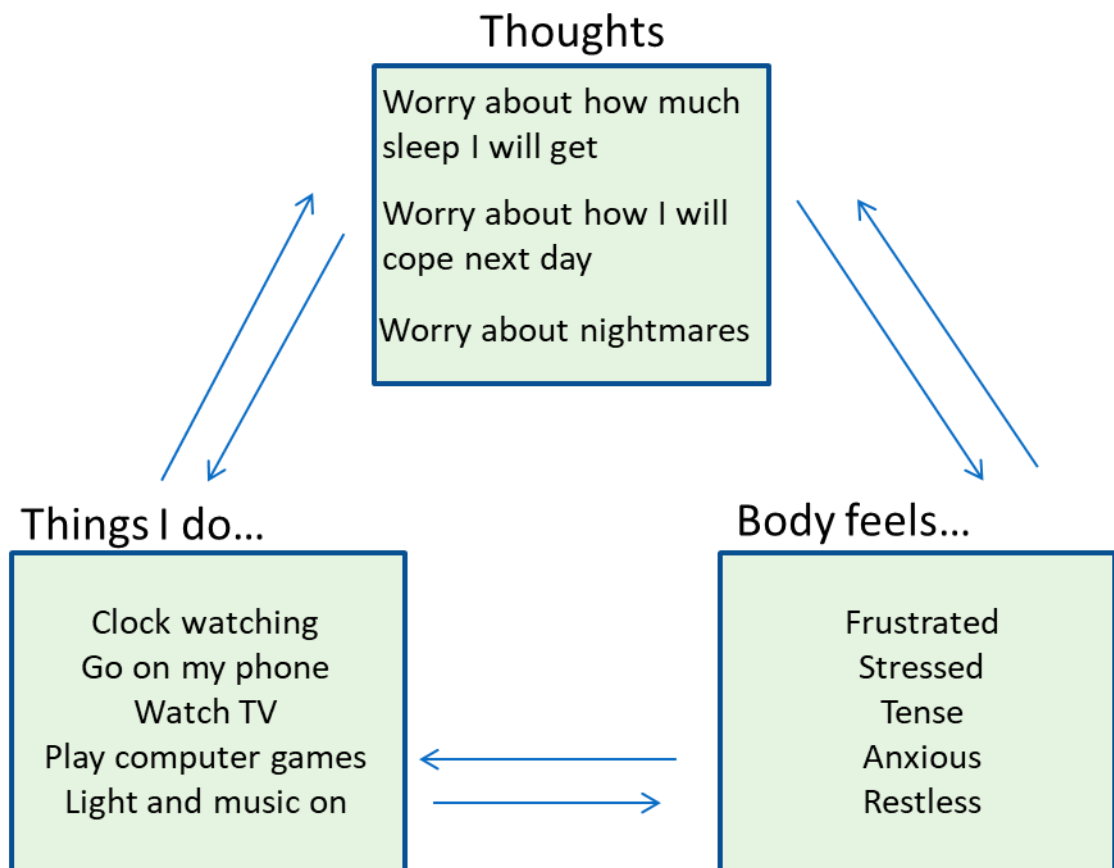
Could any of the above be confusing your body clock and making it hard for you to fall asleep?

If so, what could you do to try and change this?

Vicious cycle of sleep

The time spent in bed trying to get to sleep can be really stressful.

One of the biggest findings in sleep research is that the more we worry about sleep—about getting enough, about how our day will be, about why we can't sleep—the more this gets in the way of us being able to sleep!



When sleep works well, it is an automatic process. It works without us thinking about it.

All of the tips in this guide will help sleep to become a more automatic process for you again.

Making sleep more automatic

Two key ideas:

1. Only use your bed for sleep
2. Sleep scheduling

Only use your bed for sleep:

When we are spending time in bed during the day and completing other activities in bed, for example, eating, playing computer games or completing school/college work, our brain can get confused and find it hard to know that bed = sleep.

Try not to use your bed for anything except sleep.

Sleep scheduling:

Sleep scheduling is about trying to reduce the amount of time you spend in bed trying to get to sleep. There are two ideas involved in this:

1. Waiting until we are feeling sleepy before getting into bed at night and letting go of the idea that we should be in bed at a certain time.
2. Setting a fixed time to get up in the morning and not napping throughout the day.



Sleep scheduling continued

How do I know when I am sleepy?

Feeling sleepy is slightly different to feeling tired. We can feel tired at any time of day and it often involves us feeling irritable, yawning and having low energy levels but we don't tend to feel ready to fall asleep. When we are sleepy, we tend to have itchy eyes, struggle to keep our eyes open, feel our head dropping, our limbs feel heavier and we feel like we could fall asleep at any moment.

Does this mean I will get less sleep?

Sleep scheduling might mean that you get into bed later than usual as you may not feel sleepy until the early hours of the morning, however, the time you spend in bed will hopefully be more restful and have fewer interruptions.

Now is a good time to try and get our sleep and body clock back on track as we are likely to have fewer important tasks to complete the next day and we are still able to complete daily tasks on limited hours of sleep.

What if I still can't get to sleep?

If you have waited until you are sleepy before getting into bed but still find yourself lying awake, try getting back out of bed and completing a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again.



Wind-down routine

To help us to feel sleepy and cue our brain for sleep, it can be helpful to have a soothing wind-down routine. This routine should focus on the couple of hours before you typically get into bed and include activities to help you start unwinding. This might be having a bath/shower, changing into pyjamas, having a warm drink and light snack, or watching TV.

Use space below to think about how this might look for you.

Approximate time	Activity
e.g. 8pm 8.30pm	Shower Watching TV with warm drink and biscuit



Motivation to get up and out of bed

Many people at the best of times can find mornings to be a tricky time of the day- especially if sleep has been poor, if we don't have something to look forward to that day or if we have lots on our minds. However, reducing the time that we spend in bed after waking up is important when training our brain to know bed = sleep.

To help with this, it could be an idea to develop a soothing morning routine – a structured plan where we try to make mornings more relaxing. For example, getting up at a fixed time and watching your favourite programme or having a nice breakfast. Getting a blast of sunlight in the morning is a really effective way to wake up and start the day. Try opening your curtains/blinds as soon as you wake up and having your breakfast in front of a window.

Use the space below to think about how your morning routine might look.

Approximate time	Activity
e.g. 8.30am 8.45am	Wake up and make bed Breakfast



Staying active

Staying active can be difficult at the moment, especially if the restrictions prevent us from doing things that we would normally be doing.

However, it is important to try and stay active during the day as it helps to tire us out and can make it easier for us to fall asleep in the evening.

Try setting some goals for each day. For example, going for a walk, completing an online exercise video, playing your favourite game or playing with your pets.

Use the space below to think about what goals you might like to set.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If you find yourself coming up with ideas of activities that you are currently unable to complete, write these down on scraps of paper and keep them in a glass or a jar. You will then be able to look back at these ideas in the future.



Worry

As we saw in the vicious cycle of sleep, worry is a big contributor to sleep difficulties and for many of us our levels of anxiety and worry have been heightened by the uncertainty of the current situation.

Below are two techniques that can help you better manage your worries.

Writing the worries out

- Once we recognise that we are worrying, capturing the worry by writing it down can help.
- There are many ways you can write your worries down:
 - Worry diary
 - Put them in a worry jar, worry bag or worry box
 - Draw your worries as pictures

Worry time

A very powerful technique for dealing with worry is to take back control and decide when you would like to give it your full attention. After you capture your worries you can keep them and rather than worry about them all the time, you can put time aside specifically for worry.

Morning	Afternoon	Evening
6	12	6
7	1	7
8	2	8
9	3	8
10	4	
11	5	

Notes:

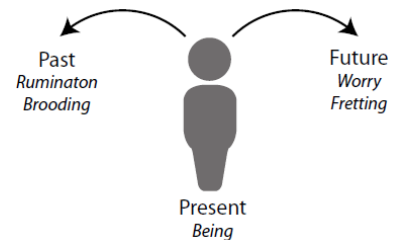
Worry!

Decide when, where and how long you will worry for. Set aside this time each day for worry.

If you find yourself worrying at other times in the day write the worry down and remind yourself that you can worry about that in your worry time.

Mindfulness

When we are feeling anxious our brain can start time travelling, thinking about difficult past experiences and worrying about potential future experiences. The techniques below can help bring you back to the present moment. They require a little bit of practice so try not to be discouraged if you find them difficult or uncomfortable at first.



Take Ten Breaths

Take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until your lungs are completely empty – and then allow them to refill by themselves.

Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying. Notice them refilling. Notice your rib cage rising and falling. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders.

See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just passing cars, driving past outside your house.

Expand your awareness: simultaneously notice your breathing and your body. Then look around the room and notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch and feel.

Notice 5 things

Pause for a moment.

Look around and notice five things that you can see.

Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.

Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet on the floor, your back against the chair)

Finally, do all of the above simultaneously!



Mindfulness continued



Dropping Anchor

Plant your feet into the floor

Push them down – notice the floor beneath you, supporting you

Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down

Notice your entire body, and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet

Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you - where you are and what you're doing.

Resources

Some people find it easier to listen to recordings of the above exercises. There are several free audio resources online that can be found through Google or YouTube searches for 'guided mindfulness'.

Alternatively, the website below provides access to free audio resources created by Russ Harris, a psychotherapist who is highly trained in the delivery of mindfulness exercises.

<https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/free-audio/>

Nightmares

When we wake up from a nightmare we can often feel very scared. Our brain and body react to the nightmare as if it is a real-life threat, causing us to go into high alert and making it hard for us to fall back asleep.

Grounding yourself and reminding your brain that you are safe and in your bedroom will likely decrease the distress that you experience following a nightmare and make it easier for you to fall back asleep.

Also, getting into more of a regular routine with our sleep tends to reduce the number of nightmares we experience.

How do I ground myself?

By grounding ourselves, we aim to reduce our body's anxiety response by bringing our focus back to the present moment. Grounding works best when we use all of our senses. In addition to the mindfulness exercises on the previous pages, try some of the suggestions below or come up with your own ideas of how you might ground yourself.

Sight:

- Turn on the light and re-familiarise yourself with your surroundings
- Look for important or meaningful items in your bedroom to tell your brain that you are in your room and you are safe



Sound:

- Listen out for familiar sounds within your environment e.g. traffic outside
- Listen to soothing music or an audio book



Touch:

- Feel the weight of your bedding and blankets on your body
- Hold any soft toys that you might have in your room
- Keep a stress ball or toy near your bed that you could squeeze or play with

Taste:

- Keep a glass of water by your bed



Smell:

- Keep a relaxing essential oil or unlit fragranced candle by your bed
- Spray fragrances used by loved ones onto a tissue or item of clothing and keep it by your bed

Thank you for reading this guide, we hope that you found it helpful.

There is a lot of information in here. It may be that not all of it is relevant to you. It can help to think about the main ideas you want to take away and the first changes you want to try out.

Use the space below to note down the ideas that you might like to try.



It can also really help to keep track of our sleep – what time we got to sleep each night and wake up each morning and whether we woke in the night. Just to help us see if any of the changes we are making are helping.

Our sleep is, of course, only one aspect of our wellbeing. The current situation is likely to be affecting many areas of our life.

There are many resources available online, but we've added the Young Minds website here as it contains links to resources and support specifically for young people during lockdown.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/coronavirus-and-mental-health/>

This brief guide was compiled by Dr Rebecca Rollinson (Clinical Psychologist) and Joanne Clarkin (Assistant Psychologist) from the Bury North Youth team. For more information on any of these ideas, please speak to your care co-ordinator or check out the following original sources:

- Colin Espie's book: Overcoming insomnia and sleep problems: A self help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques.
- Alison Harvey and Daniel Buysse's book: Treating sleep problems: A transdiagnostic approach.