Getting a good night's sleep

A guide during the Covid-19 lockdown

Why is sleep important?

We all know that we feel better after a good night's sleep. But you may not realise just how important sleep is for both our physical and mental health.

Here are some of the reasons why sleep is important:

- Sleep allows our bodies to repair and boosts our immune system
- Sleep improves our memory and concentration
- Sleep reduces stress and helps us to better manage our mood
- Sleep helps us to maintain healthy weight and appetite
- Sleep helps us to process the day before and prepare for the day ahead

During the coronavirus lockdown it is important that we do what we can to protect our health and happiness. As you can see here, sleeping well is an important part of this. So, read on for more advice around getting a good night's sleep during the lockdown.

How might the Covid-19 lockdown be affecting our sleep?

Studies have shown that many of us are finding it harder to sleep well right now. But why is this?

1. We might be feeling more stressed & worried

The coronavirus has caused big changes to our lives that might make us feel more stressed or worried than usual. For example:

- We might feel worried about the health and safety of ourselves and our friends and family.
- We might feel stressed about having to stay at home and be missing our normal routines and relationships.
- We might feel confused and worried about the future.

With all these thoughts and feelings it's no surprise that we might be finding it harder to feel relaxed, calm and restful at night!

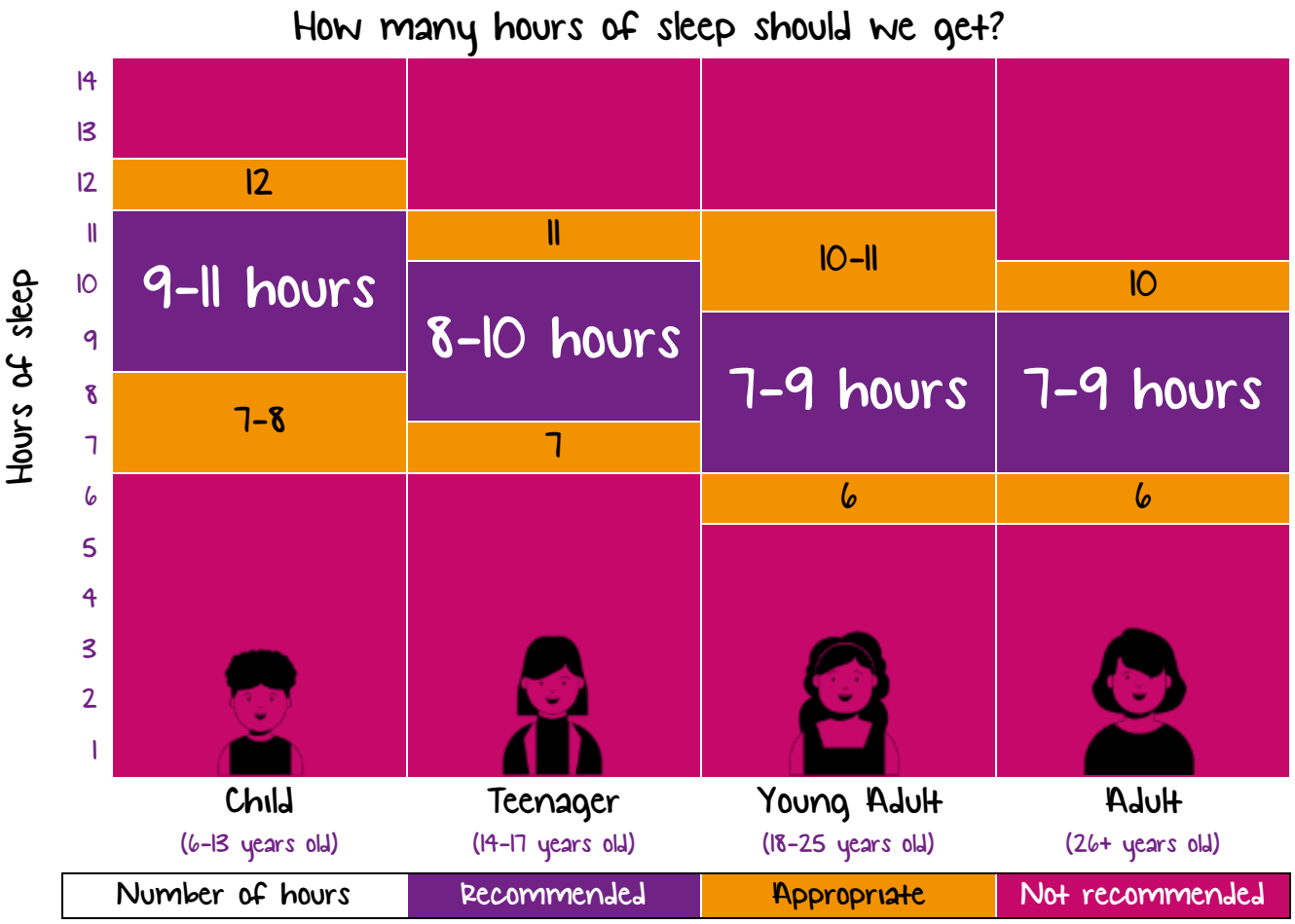
2. Our normal routines have changed

With all of us having to stay home as much as possible, our day-to-day lives have changed in ways that can have a big impact on our sleep. For example:

- Without our normal routines of going to school/college/work, many of us might be going to bed and getting out of bed at widely different times during the week.
- We may be exposed to less natural light than usual and without this our brains find it harder to know what time it is and when we should be sleeping.
- Exercise during the day helps us to sleep better at night. But since we are all having to stay at home we are likely to be moving and using our bodies less.
- Social interaction with others can also help our sleep but this has also been limited by the lockdown.

As these factors in our lives are changing, our sleeping patterns can also become disrupted. Our body clock is not being regulated like it was pre-COVID-19 and that contributes to our ability (or inability) to fall asleep and stay asleep during the night.

How much sleep do we need?



We do not all need the exact same amount of sleep. Many factors including our genes, our metabolism and our lifestyle can impact on how much sleep we need. For example, if you exercise a lot, or are working a lot, you might need more sleep than usual to recover, or process the information you have been handling. On average, adults are recommended to have around 8 hours of sleep.

This is a general guideline, and most people's "ideal amount of sleep" will fall between 7 and 11 hours depending on age. Some people will have longer or shorter nights, but if you are far away from the purple zone, it is worth checking that you are neither under sleeping nor oversleeping!

If you don't get enough sleep...

Too little sleep can lead to:

- Difficulty paying attention, concentrating, and remembering things
- Feeling irritable or feeling different
- Slower reaction time, and a reduced ability to judge situations well
- A reduced physical coordination

If you are sleeping for too long...

Too much sleep can lead to:

- A headache (possibly for lack of water for an extended period of time)
- Anxiety, low mood, grogginess
- Sleep fragmentation, that is sleeping on an "on and off" basis, and therefore having lighter and less restorative sleep.

Consistently sleeping too little or consistently sleeping too much can lead to increased risks of health issues, including obesity, diabetes, depression, heart disease, mood disorders, cognitive impairment, and fatigue.

Try not to overthink it!

Being anxious about getting enough sleep is often counterproductive and can lead you to not be able to enter the relaxed and calm state that favours sleep. Whilst it is important to be aware of the value of sleep and good sleep routines, try not to be anxious about it. When sleep is not coming your way, give yourself a break, and try to accept that tonight might not be the night, leave the bed and try again when you are sleepy!

Sleep and Immune system

COVID-19 has brought a lot of change to our daily lives but, one thing it has highlighted is, the importance of a good night sleep.

Why a lack of sleep is bad for your health?

Unfortunately, we have all had the effects of lack of sleep such as, feeling grumpy and not working at your best. But did you know that sleep deprivation can also have profound consequences on your physical health?

- Regular poor sleep puts you at risk of serious medical conditions, including heart disease – and it shortens your life expectancy. Please take a look at NHS website for further details on medical conditions.

- It also helps maintains weight, reducing chances of diabetes and heart disease which has profound affects not only on her physical health but, your mental health too.

Benefits of sleep on the immune system?

Having a regular and consistent good night's sleep is one of the best ways we can improve our immunity and defend against viruses and disease. Research has shown that sleep is an effective tool in helping our immune system and here are some of the benefits:

- Sleep is a natural immune booster. Prolonged lack of sleep can disrupt your immune system, so you are less able to fend off bugs.
- Sleep boosts mental wellbeing. When people with anxiety or depression were surveyed to calculate their sleeping habits, it turned out that most of them slept for less than 6 hours a night. Getting enough sleep allows you feel calm and well-rested for the next day.
- Sleep Improves the Immune System's Response to Threats. Having enough sleep allows the body to repair and release proteins that help support cells in the body to combat infections and diseases.

What can I do to ensure I get good sleep?

Follow the tips and advice given in this document, to ensure you are following expert advice on how much sleep you should be getting and how to create an environment to sleep well in.

What can we do during the day to help our sleep?

1. When you wake up

Try not to check your phone for the first 5 minutes of the day, this can create anticipatory anxiety, and lead your body to automatically increase your stress levels.

2. After a bad sleep

1. Try not to sleep in.
Your circadian rhythm needs regularity, and this would push back your sleep schedule.

2. Try not to go to bed much earlier than usual.

3. Try not to nap, especially late in the afternoon.

3. Light on and off

Your brain and body need light to keep the daytime/ night-time schedule.
Try to get sunlight for 20 minutes in the morning. If it is not possible for you to go outside, open a window to get some fresh air and sunlight in the morning.

4. Exercise and sleep

Doing exercise regularly, helps improve the quality and quantity of your sleep. It is best to avoid exercise right before bed. Good sleep helps you perform well, and have the motivation to exercise.

5. Sleep loves routine

Maintaining your routine helps your sleep maintain its routine:

- Keep your morning and bedtime routines (shower, reading, getting ready for the next day)
- Try to stick to your normal wake and sleep time (or close to these)
- Try to limit how much you sleep-in at the weekend
- Make a daily timetable of what you will be doing

6. Caffeine & Diet

Avoid caffeine 6 hours before you go to bed. This includes coffee, tea and chocolate.

Avoid a heavy meal right before bed, especially with spicy or sugary foods.

7. Reduce stress

Reduce stressors:
- Avoid reading news updates, or other stressful information (i.e. schoolwork) right before bed.
- Make a worry list and look at it the next day with fresh eyes and someone else to discuss it with.

8. Your bed – haven of sleep

Try to keep your bed for sleeping and move other activities away from your bed.

It can be tempting to work in bed or watch movies in bed, but this will make your brain associate work and entertainment to your bed, instead of calm and sleep.

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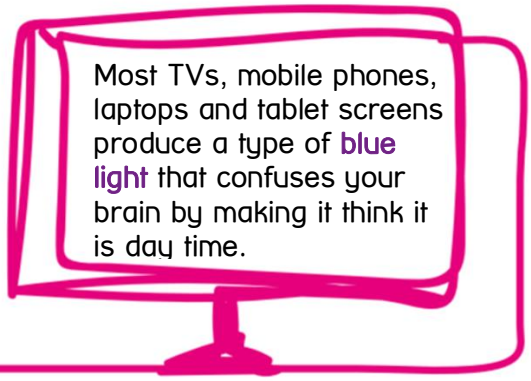
What can help us to feel relaxed and ready for sleep at night?

Things to avoid before sleep:

Caffeine – is found in tea, coffee, chocolate, and some fizzy drinks, including cola and energy drinks like Red Bull, and can keep you awake. It takes a while for caffeine to leave your system so it's best to try and avoid it for around 6 hours before sleep.

Sugar – can keep you awake or reduce the quality of the sleep you do get. So, if you're struggling to get to bed or feeling tired in the morning it might be worth cutting back on sugary snacks in the evenings.

Your brain thinks "it's light, so I should be awake". For this reason, if you try to go to bed soon after watching or looking at a screen, you'll probably find it harder to get to sleep, and the sleep you do have is likely to be less restful. So, you might find it helpful to turn off screens an hour before bedtime and explore other ways that help you to relax and wind down.



Most TVs, mobile phones, laptops and tablet screens produce a type of **blue light** that confuses your brain by making it think it is day time.

Top tips for a restful room

- Get your bedroom as dark you can, make sure your curtains or blinds cut out as much light as possible and switch off LED lights
- Try to cut out noise too, including loud clocks; you could try wearing ear plugs
- Try to keep your bedroom tidy and not too cluttered, so it is a relaxing place to go when it is time to go to bed
- Keep your bedroom cool, but not too cold; open the window a little if it is safe to do so

Things you could include in your evening routine

Take a shower or bath before bed

Try out different herbal teas

Writing down your worries

Read a few pages, or many pages of a book

Listen to an audiobook on audible or other platforms

Try Mindfulness, breathing exercises, or other relaxation techniques

Listen to a podcast or some relaxing music

Listen to some sleep stories on youtube or an app.

Apps designed to help you relax and sleep:

Pzizz

Calm

Sleep Cycle

Stop, Breathe, Think

Useful videos

- Ted Ed – What would happen if you didn't sleep?
- Every Mind Matters - Tips for Better Sleep
- Dot B – Beditation Mindfulness Exercise
- The Sleep Council – 10 Commandments of Sleep
- Mind – Jonny Benjamin's personal story and advice about insomnia

More online sleep support

- The Sleep Council has a wide range of advice and tools for all ages including a free 30 day sleep plan and downloadable sleep diaries.
- Mind has more advice on how to cope with sleep problems and a coronavirus information hub with further support on looking after your wellbeing during the lockdown.
- Every Mind Matters has more support on sleep and can offer tailored wellbeing advice with their Mind Plan Quiz
- Evelina London Children's Healthcare have created Covid-19 specific sleep tips for families.
- Audible are offering free audiobooks for young people while schools are closed.

If you want to talk to someone

Childline free 1-to-1 chat support and helpline 9am-midnight every day. Call **0800 1111** or visit **childline.org.uk/get-support/**

Kooth is an online platform, where anyone aged 11-25 can get support from counsellors until 10pm every day. Visit **kooth.com**

The Mix has a free, confidential phone line, web-chat and crisis text line, to help anyone under 25. Call **0808 808 4994**, text **85258** or visit **themix.org.uk**