

Tips to Improve Sleep for Health Care Providers During COVID-19



Department of Psychiatry

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

Healthcare providers and staff are on the frontline of the pandemic response. Decreased sleep quality and quantity including difficulty falling and staying asleep, sleeping too much, distressing dreams and sometimes nightmares are common during times of stress and the current period of prolonged urgency, uncertainty and heightened work/life demands. The following are concrete suggestions to help improve sleep during this challenging time.

Establish a sleep routine

Try to stick to a regular sleep and wake up time. If your work shifts change frequently, still try to use the same bedtime rituals each day.



Wind down before bed

Identify a relaxing routine 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime. Take a bath or hot shower, transition into sleepwear, read a book, listen to calming music or a guided meditation. Use the same routine before turning off the lights. You are signaling to your body to let go of the day and that sleep is coming.



Aerobic exercise helps sleep!

Prioritize 30-45 minutes of daily aerobic exercise to raise your body temperature and release endorphins which mitigate insomnia. Try dancing to your favorite music, go for a run or bike ride, walk quickly or consider an online aerobic video. Even a 10-minute walk around the hospital, office or neighborhood is better than no exercise.



Limit screen time an hour before bed

Blue light can suppress the natural production of melatonin and shift your wake-sleep cycle to a later bedtime.



Avoid activating your brain before and in bed

Place your phone away from the bed, skip distressing news or TV shows and save social media for the next day. Practice relaxing, low and slow breathing or use guided meditations. If you are still awake after 30 minutes, get out of bed, sit in a quiet room with low lighting and engage in a relaxing (and boring!) activity until you feel sleepy again and return to bed.



If you are having trouble falling or staying asleep for more than 4-5 nights or experiencing distressing dreams or nightmares, please reach out to 303-724-4987 for a consultation with our sleep experts.



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Tips to Improve Sleep for Health Care Providers During COVID-19, continued

Restorative yoga

This gentle, slow yoga uses props like blankets or pillows to hold relaxing poses. Great for beginners and individuals of all ages. Deeply relaxing and ideal for releasing the stress of the day and for transition to bedtime. Try [Yoga with Adriene](#) for some online restorative yoga options.



Minimize drug & alcohol use before bed



Alcohol and recreational drugs have been shown to alter sleep quality and reduce the amount of restorative sleep. Limit THC use in any form as well as caffeine intake particularly towards the end of your day/shift as you approach the 3-4 hours before you expect to sleep.

Daytime sleep

Use blackout curtains and white noise machines or apps, and keep bedrooms cool. If you have family or roommates at home, request periods of quiet time to ensure uninterrupted daytime sleep.



Quiet your brain

During this highly stressful time, meditation can reduce daily worries and physiological arousal of stress, making it easier to fall and stay asleep. Guided sleep meditations are available on apps such as [CALM](#) and [Headspace](#). If meditation isn't right for you, distraction with other activities can be calming as well.



Sunlight!

Seek sunlight during the day whenever possible. During night shifts, use bright lights to keep your work space well-lit. Exposure to bright light activates circadian rhythms signaling daytime. At the end of the day/nighttime or end of a shift, use soft lighting, turn off overhead lights, and close curtains to signal your body for nighttime and time for rest. Naps before a night shift in the evening can help you catch up on sleep and enhance wakefulness on shift.

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