Sleep and COVID-19

Sleep has a major effect on overall health and quality of life, including the way we look, feel, and perform on a daily basis. A pandemic can challenge a person's sleep habits, even for those who have never struggled with sleep. Stress, worry, and anxiety, for example, can make a person's mind race and cause tossing and turning throughout the night (Sleep Foundation, 2020). Without the pressure of having to be at work or school or day care by a certain time, people may stay up later, sleep in longer, and/or nap in the middle of the day. As a result, circadian rhythms become disrupted (Sleep Foundation, 2020). Circadian rhythms are 24-hour internal cycles that tell the body when to do certain things such as sleep, wake, and eat. Disruptions to a person's natural sleep-wake cycle can have negative effects on mental health.

Barriers to sleep

- Anxiety and worry
- Stress
- Fatigue or weariness
- Disrupted routines
- Depression
- Grief
- Isolation or loneliness
- Fear
- Too much information or screen time

The power of sleep

- Strengthens the immune system
- Promotes emotional wellness
- Enhances mental health
- Reduces stress, irritability, impatience, and moodiness
- Lowers anxiety
- Fights depression
- Improves mood
- Boosts brain function

The Sleep Foundation (2020) recommends these steps to improve sleep during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Establish a steady day and nighttime routine — and stick with it.
- Wind down at bedtime. Light reading, meditating, or stretching is okay, but avoid TVs, movies on computers, and blue light from phones.
- Don't work in bed. Use your bed for sleep and sex only.
- Get up if you can't sleep. If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and participate in a quiet, relaxing activity.
- Wash your sheets and fluff your pillows often. Use lavender oil or linen spray to help you feel fresh and comfortable.

- Spend time in the sun or natural light during the day. Open blinds and windows to let in light.
- Avoid napping; especially long naps or naps that occur late in the day.
- Keep moving. Daily physical activity enhances sleep.
- Stay connected. Because kindness and spreading joy reduce stress and enhance mood, staying connected ultimately affects sleep.
- Be positive. Positivity helps combat doom and gloom, which can lead to stress, worry, and anxiety.
- Eat smart and healthy. Avoid heavy meals before bedtime as well as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.

Focusing on sleep during a pandemic is especially important as it may help you stay healthy to prevent contracting COVID-19, and it can also help you recover if you get sick (ASA, 2020; Sleep Foundation, 2020). Because "consistent, high-quality sleep improves virtually all aspects of health," the Sleep Foundation (2020) stresses the importance of paying attention to sleep and practicing good sleep hygiene during this time of crisis.

References

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