

How are you sleeping? Tips from the experts



Environmental triggers like COVID-19 can affect anyone's ability to fall or stay asleep

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began, you might be having trouble sleeping. “One of the most frequent sleep problems reported by our patients right now is adjustment insomnia, a type of insomnia that is triggered by stress or environmental changes,” says Tiffany Braley, MD, associate professor in Neurology at the University of Michigan and a researcher who specializes in fatigue and sleep disorders in multiple sclerosis. “Feelings of uncertainty and isolation, schedule changes imposed by quarantine, and new challenges in navigating healthcare systems for MS care have undoubtedly affected our patients’ ability to fall asleep, stay asleep or both.”

You can take control of sleep problems, even now. Here are some tips:

Stick to a sleep routine, even during times of quarantine. The National Sleep Foundation breaks down your “sleep routine” into three parts:

- Set your alarm for a time to wake up — a fixed time to get every day started. Shower and get dressed, even if you are not leaving the house.
- Give yourself an hour or so to wind down, to relax and get ready for bed. “Engage in relaxing activities before bed, as opposed to stimulating or upsetting shows or games,” Braley advises. “Avoid screen time within several hours of bedtime; the blue spectrum light emitted from our electronic devices inhibits our brain’s production of melatonin (a hormone that promotes sleep).”
- Bedtime: Pick a consistent time to actually turn out the lights and try to fall asleep. If you’re having a hard time sleeping, don’t spend more than 20 minutes tossing and turning. Instead, get out of bed and do something relaxing in very low light, and then head back to bed to try to fall asleep.

Want to learn more?

- [Sleepio](#) is an online program that focuses on cognitive behavioral techniques. There is a cost, which might be covered by insurance.
- The University of Michigan’s My MS Toolkit features tips on how to [break the cycle of sleepless nights](#).
- Read [sleep guidelines](#) specific to the COVID-19 pandemic from the National Sleep Foundation.

Stay as active as possible. “Regular exercise is beneficial, but it is generally advised not to exercise too close to bedtime,” Braley says. If you have a regular routine with a fitness trainer or physical therapist, ask them for tips on how to do your routine at home. Some facilities are providing videos. If you have mobility impairments, there are options like [Move it for MS](#) or [ChairFit with Nancy](#). And physical activity is not just about exercise. Gardening, household chores, cooking or walking the dog are all good ways to stay active.

The bed is for sleeping only. Keeping the bed for sleep only is especially helpful when you are spending an extended period of time indoors, according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Try to avoid the temptation to move the laptop, phone, TV, and meals into the bedroom. If you have limited space, try to allocate one side of the bedroom for sleep alone.

Reach out for help. If your sleep problems persist, interfere with your daily activities, or you are concerned about them, reach out to your healthcare provider. “Many providers are now fully embracing virtual ‘telehealth’ visits that allow patients to continue working with their provider in the safety of their home,” Braley says. A sleep specialist may be consulted via telemedicine as well.

Web Exclusive

The Society continues to support those living with MS during this time. Visit our [COVID 19](#)

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