

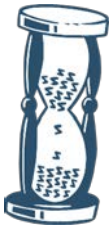
Sleep during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tips for teens



Sleep, along with physical activity and healthy food, is important for staying mentally and physically healthy. Changes in sleep that naturally occur in the teenage years, combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on day-to-day life, may mean that the amount, timing and quality of your sleep has been different from usual. Here are some tips to help with your sleep during this time of change.

Getting enough sleep



As a teenager, your body is growing and developing and your brain is going through huge changes (a bit like re-wiring itself). Getting enough, good quality sleep supports these physical and mental changes, and is important for helping you to learn, fight off illness (see our **Sleep and Immunity** sheet) and stay mentally well (see our **Sleep and Mental Health** sheet). So, how much sleep is enough? It is recommended that teenagers get 8 – 10 hours sleep each day. Everyone's sleep need is different, so you may find you need a little more or a little less than some of your friends.

Keeping your body clock on track



We all have an internal circadian biological clock (body clock) that is the timekeeper of processes in our brain and body, including sleeping and waking. You may have found that as you became a teenager your body started wanting to go to sleep later at night and to wake up later in the morning, compared to when you were younger. This is normal and is a natural change to your body clock that many teens experience. The COVID-19 restrictions may mean your sleep patterns have shifted even later due to normal day-to-day activities being disrupted.

The tricky thing is, particularly now that school has re-started online, you may not get enough sleep on school nights if you go to bed very late but need to get up early the next morning. Understandably, you may try to 'catch up' on sleep by sleeping in at the weekend, which can result in you feeling tired, grumpy and unable to concentrate (like having jetlag). If this is the case for you, you might need to gradually shift your body clock (and sleep times) back to fit the school timetable. Work out what time you need to get up on a school morning and count back the number of hours sleep you need – that will be your ideal bedtime. Then try to go to bed and wake up about 30 minutes earlier every few days, until you are going to bed at the right time for you.

Regular sleeping and waking routines

What we do when we are awake affects our sleep and consistency in our daytime activities is the key to getting enough, good quality sleep on a regular basis. Try not to change bedtimes and wake times by more than 2 hours between the week (school days) and weekend and try to do similar, relaxing things each night before you go to bed, like having a shower and reading a book.



Things outside of our body (external time cues) are needed to help keep our body clock in time with the 24 hour day. Light is the most important time cue, so ideally going outside in natural light for at least 30 minutes in the morning will help to keep your body clock on track (see our **General Sleep and Circadian Health Information** sheet). If you can't go outside then try and sit by a window, for example when you're eating your breakfast. Other cues include things like regular meal times and exercise times. Physical distancing and having to stay in your Bubble has likely impacted when and how you have been able to do your normal activities, like socialising with friends and exercise. Try to go for a regular walk, run or bike ride with your Bubble or have a group chat with your friends – if you can, set these for a similar time each day.

Technology

Using technology, like smartphones and tablets, can be a great way to stay connected with people outside of your Bubble, like friends and whānau. It's understandable if you are using technology more often during the pandemic, but it's good to be aware that light from screens has alerting effects and video game and movie content can be disturbing or stimulating, which can make it difficult to fall asleep. To help get a good night's sleep, try and limit technology use at least 1 hour before bedtime, keep screens outside of your bedroom, especially when you go to bed, and aim for a balance between technology-based and other activities during the day.



Caffeine

Caffeine is in a variety of food and drinks, including chocolate, coffee, energy drinks and cola drinks. Consuming caffeine, especially in the afternoon or evening, can make it difficult to get to sleep or stay asleep. Try and limit how often you have food or drink containing caffeine and, when you do, try and stick to eating or drinking them in the morning.



Other changes to sleep during COVID-19

You may have noticed that you are feeling more anxious, having more vivid dreams or finding it more difficult to get to sleep than usual. This is understandable and normal (for people of all ages), as we are living through a very unique time (see our **Sleep and Mental Health** sheet). Talking through any worries you may have with a trusted member of your whānau or friend may help. Remember to be kind to yourself and try to build in some fun things to do during the day and relaxing things in the evening, like having a bath.



You can find our other information sheets on our website www.sleepwake.ac.nz.

