

Sleep Hygiene

Last Updated - May 23, 2024 - 08:29 AM

Long COVID can affect your sleep

Long COVID can disrupt your body's natural rhythms that help reinforce a healthy sleep/wake cycle and ensure you get a restful and restorative sleep. People with long COVID can experience a heightened state of alertness within their nervous system, which makes falling asleep, staying asleep, or getting into a deep sleep state more difficult.

Sleep is often a key factor in progressing your recovery from long COVID. If your sleep patterns have changed significantly as a result of long COVID, it may be helpful to start a sleep journal so you can get a clear understanding of how much sleep you are getting and what kinds of things might be impacting your sleep.

To keep a sleep journal, every morning, write a few notes about how much deep sleep you got, how much of the night you were in light or restless sleep, and when you fell asleep and woke up. You can also make a note of how well-rested you felt upon waking. Some activity tracker technology will track this for you, if you wear your activity tracker to bed.



What you may experience

Many people with long COVID describe feeling “wired but tired” and have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Some people find they sleep more than usual but they continue to feel fatigued or exhausted no

matter how much sleep they get.

By using sleep hygiene strategies as well as cognitive/behavioural strategies to reinforce healthy sleep patterns, we can encourage our bodies to get a deeper and more restorative night's sleep.

Techniques to help you sleep

Get up at the same time every morning

- Getting up at the same time every day will help set your natural readiness to fall asleep.

Limit long naps late in the day

- If you don't feel sleepy during normal overnight hours, try keeping your naps to less than 30 minutes and earlier in the day such as late morning or early afternoon.

Don't try to "tire" yourself out

- Avoid significant exercise or mentally stimulating activities in the evening as this wakes and alerts your brain.

Have a wind-down routine

- Plan time earlier in the day for completing stressful or important tasks from your “to do” list. Prepare for bed with the same routine of relaxing activities starting 30 minutes to an hour before bed (such as a bath, reading in soft lighting, listening to music, or a meditation designed for sleep).

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine

- Caffeine can take more than 8 hours to wear off fully. Nicotine is a stimulant. Alcohol may help you fall asleep but generally inhibits a deeper, more restorative sleep.

Techniques to help you sleep

Try a “sleepy” snack

- Research shows foods such as oatmeal, cheese, nuts, or chamomile tea can promote better sleep.

Keep a cool, dark, and quiet bedroom

- This reinforces the association between your bed and sleep. Avoid doing wakeful activities, such as screen time or office work, from your bed.

Allow only 20 minutes to fall asleep

- After 20 minutes, try getting up for a short time and doing a calming activity. Only return to bed when you feel sleepy.

Try extra support for comfort

- Try pillows under or between your knees or hugged to your chest while lying on your side.

When to talk to a doctor

It is helpful to talk to a doctor if you have new or worse problems with your sleep. There are many illnesses other than long COVID that can affect sleep. Some of these (such as sleep apnea, depression and post-traumatic disorder [PTSD]) may start or get worse due to long COVID.

In particular, we suggest you see a doctor if you have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Snoring
- Gasping or choking during sleep
- Waking up with headaches
- Excessive drowsiness during the day
- Consistently waking up too early and not being able to fall back asleep

- Nightmares
- Night sweats
- Waking up multiple times to use the washroom

Your doctor may arrange further tests such as a sleep study to investigate these symptoms further.

Supplements and medications for sleep

There are many supplements and medications available to help you sleep.

Melatonin (a synthetic version of a hormone) and magnesium (a mineral) are over-the-counter supplements that are relatively safe and helpful for some people. Please speak with a pharmacist if you are unsure which dose or brand to try.

It's best that you talk to a doctor regarding other over-the-counter sleep aids (such as Tylenol PM, Sleep-eze, Zzzquil, and Nytol) as they have more side-effects and can interact with your other medications.

There are multiple other medications that require prescription (examples include zopiclone, quetiapine, clonazepam, and lemborexant [Dayvigo]). Ask your doctor if one of these is right for you.

Where to next?

- Speak to your primary care practitioner or pharmacist about safe use of natural sleep aids
- Read or listen to [an article about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia \(CBT-I\)](#) (Sleep Foundation, July 7, 2023)
- Watch these videos related to this topic:
 - [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia \(CBT-I\)](#) by ADAA, Anxiety and Depression Association of America
 - [CCDP Sleep](#) by BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre

