

Sleep Tips

Getting good sleep is essential for both physical and emotional healing. While sleep is often disrupted following a stressful event (like being dispersed and providing care during a pandemic), there are strategies to help you get back on track. Practicing good sleep hygiene now may help you avoid larger health problems later.

- Get back to a regular sleep schedule. **Maintain a consistent wake and bed time.** You may not feel entirely rested in the morning initially, but resist the urge to lounge in bed or doze. Keeping a consistent schedule helps your body reset its circadian rhythm.
- If you can, **avoid naps** as you readjust to your regular schedule. If you must nap to avoid fatigue on the job, limit it to 30 minutes or less.
- Be careful with your **caffeine intake.** Avoid the urge to increase your caffeine use and stop drinking it after lunch. The half-life of caffeine is 5-6 hours and can therefore impact your sleep even 10 hours after you last ingested it.
- Be mindful of drinking **alcohol.** It's a good idea to keep an eye on alcohol use after any stressful event, and it's important to recognize that it can disrupt your sleep hours after you drink it. Although some people find that alcohol helps them fall asleep faster, the quality of your sleep suffers as the alcohol is metabolized. Stay within healthy guidelines for alcohol consumption and avoid drinking after dinner to reduce the impact of alcohol on your sleep.
- **Exercise** can both reduce stress and contribute to healthy sleep. Initiate or return to a regular exercise routine as part of your healthy lifestyle, whether that includes yoga, jogging, or tai chi. But be mindful of your timing: avoid exercising within 2-3 hours of bedtime, as it will increase your core body temperature and interfere with good sleep.
- **Develop a wind-down routine.** Devote the last 2 hours of your day to relaxing and preparing for bed. Discontinue activating behaviors such as watching the news or reviewing finances. Instead watch a comedy or practice a relaxation exercise. Develop a nightly routine that includes things like brushing your teeth, activating the "do not disturb" feature on your phone, and/or changing into pajamas. Having a nightly routine will train your mind and body to prepare for sleep.
- **Don't worry in bed.** In the weeks immediately following a stressful event, it's normal to feel anxious and revisit the event. Allow yourself to process those thoughts and feelings, but avoid doing so in bed. Over time, this will condition you to feel and think anxiously in bed. Only get in bed when you're ready to sleep, and get out of bed if you are feeling anxious or stressed. Practice a relaxation exercise before you get back into bed.

Allow yourself some time to process your experience and readjust to your "normal" life. Remember that it's common to feel on edge for a few weeks after a stressful event and don't judge or criticize yourself for this. But if you continue to experience trouble sleeping for more than a few weeks, reach out to your medical provider for help.