# **Post-COVID symptoms (long COVID) in children and young people – Sleep**

If you have had COVID-19 (coronavirus) you might have symptoms that last for a few weeks or months. This is sometimes called post-COVID or long COVID. This information gives you some ideas of things you can do to make sure that you get back to your normal activities as easily and quickly as possible.

**Improving sleep**

People of all ages who have had COVID-19 report their sleep is affected. Some have problems falling asleep, others have problems with waking up in the night. A few people sleep well, but are still more sleepy during the day. There are many different reasons for these problems.

**Tips to help improve your sleep**

**Body clock**

Stick to your normal wake and sleep times as much as possible.

When it gets dark your body releases a hormone called melatonin, which sends a signal to your body that it is time to sleep. In the morning it releases another hormone called cortisol, which sends ‘wake up’ signals, letting your body know it is time to get up.

This is why it is important to get as much daylight as possible, and to have your bedroom dark at night.

**Environment**

* Where possible, your bedroom should be for sleeping only and the rest of your day (working, sleeping, resting) should be spent elsewhere. If this is not possible, try not to sit or lie on your bed during the day. Start to develop the connection that your bedroom is just for sleeping.
* Keep your bedroom as calm as possible by tidying away any schoolwork, and taking screens out of your bedroom at night.You are more likely to fall asleep if you’re feeling calm and there are no distractions in your bedroom. This gives your brain the signal that ‘it is time to sleep now’.
* Make sure your bedroom is quiet, well-ventilated, dark and a comfortable (cool) temperature.

**Routine**

* Try to stick to a daily routine. This can help you to form good daily habits, and help you feel more productive and focused.
* Try to develop healthy habits (such as dressing, eating meals, going out, and a healthy consistent sleep routine).
* Make a daily or weekly timetable of what you will be doing, including physical activity, leisure, meals, relaxation, and family-time, to keep some structure.

**During the day**

* Try to get a good amount of daylight early in the day by going outside.
* Do 5 to 10 minutes of physical activity or gentle exercise a day, and gradually build this up.
* Avoid daytime sleeping. This can disturb your sleep/wake cycle, quality of sleep and make getting to sleep and staying asleep at night more difficult.
* Limit screen time (TV, tablets, phones and computers). Take breaks after using screens for 60 to 90 minutes. This will help reduce eye-strain and headaches.
* Vary your activities during the day. For example, seeing friends, going to school, spending time with your family, including at mealtimes.
* Try to eat meals at regular mealtimes and snacks in between. Try to avoid a heavy meal too close to bedtime.
* Sticking to conventional mealtimes can be helpful to provide cues that support the body clock. For example, eating late at night can send the wrong messages and make falling asleep more difficult.
* Avoid caffeine in the afternoon or evening. Limit caffeine (coffee, chocolate, tea, fizzy drinks like colas or energy drinks) during the day.

**Wind-down routine**

* Try to go to bed at the same time every night, and wake up at the same time each morning.
* Eat your evening meal about 3 hours before bedtime.
* Try to switch off screens 1 to 2 hours before bedtime and take screens out of your bedroom at night. Melatonin production is affected by light levels, doing stimulating activity before bed and by stress and worry. Light from screen tricks your brain into thinking it is daytime. It stops you getting into deep restorative sleep.
* Do eye-hand co-ordination activities, such as drawing or puzzles, instead of using screens.
* A relaxing activity, such as a warm bath, before bed can be helpful.

**Getting into bed**

* Turn your clock around so it is facing away from the bedside.
* Gentle music before bed can be helpful. Some people listen to white noise or soothing sounds (waves or rain).
* Some people use a chapter or 2 of an audiobook to relax them.
* Some people use lavender or bergamot oil to them sleep. Try putting 1 or 2 drops on a cotton wool ball next to your bed.
* Avoid physical activity just before bedtime as this stimulates your body rather than helping you to wind down. Practising relaxation can help.
* If ideas and thoughts are buzzing around your mind, write them down or try to think about and deal with any issues earlier in the evening to help you relax later.
* Once you’re in bed, try not to think about the days’ activities, or what you will do in the future. Think about nice places or events, or imagine relaxing images.

**Relaxation exercises**

* Resting and relaxing, for short intervals during the day, instead of daytime napping, can give you more energy. Your body needs rest to continue healing. You might find short rests through the day are helpful, even when you are improving.
* Some people find relaxation, mindfulness, yoga or gentle stretching can be relaxing before bed. There are many sorts and it is important to find one that works for you.
* It is advisable to practise these types of strategies at first during the day in rest breaks, to build your skill and confidence before using them to help with sleep. Start by practising at a time you feel calmer as it will help you to engage.
* Watching a comedy that makes you laugh a few hours before bed can produce endorphins that will help you to relax.

**In the morning**

* Set your alarm and get up at the same time every morning. Try not to get much more than an hour either side of this at the weekends.
* If you are getting to sleep very late and starting to move your bedtime slowly earlier, it is really important to have a regular wake-up time to make sure you will feel sleepy later.
* If you are taking melatonin, take it an hour before you want to go to sleep, and then switch melatonin off with bright light in the morning.
* Try to get up straight away.
* Open the curtains fully when you wake up. Bright light helps you to wake up. Some lights mimic daylight and can be useful to turn on in the morning.
* Once you’ve got up, get dressed in your day clothes. Your body will associate nightwear with winding down and going to bed.
* Remember, trying to manage fatigue by sleeping more can make things worse. Try to keep to 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, even if you feel worse to begin with. After a couple of weeks most young people start to feel better.

**Summary**

* Your sleep can be affected by lots of things.
* There are no quick fixes, but understanding how sleep works for you can really help.
* You might need to practise your strategies consistently for 2 to 3 months, as it can take a while for change to happen.
* Making small, consistent changes to your sleep routine and habits can make a big difference**.**

**More sources of information**

**Evelina London Children’s Hospital**, for sleep tips, **web** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/sleep-medicine-department/coronavirus-sleep-tips.aspx](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/sleep-medicine-department/coronavirus-sleep-tips.aspx)

**The NHS** **website** has information on sleeping well, and how to get to sleep, **web** www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness

**RaisingChildren.net**, **web** [www.raisingchildren.net.au/](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/)

**Next steps**

If your symptoms continue for several months after having COVID-19, and you are concerned that you are not getting better, please speak to your GP.

For more help with long COVID symptoms, you can go to our other resources:

* eating well
* emotional wellbeing
* going back to school
* keeping active
* socialising