Becky's corner: I just need a good night's sleep

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During such challenging times, it isn't easy to just flip a switch and turn our minds off. The emotional pressures and worry are ever-present in our thoughts.

Like many these days, you may be struggling to catch your Zs during the COVID-19 pandemic. A good night's sleep helps you to feel your best and stay healthy. Getting a good night's sleep is just as important to overall health and well-being as good handwashing, social distancing and wearing a mask.

The trick is, how do we get a good night's sleep? We're all unique, so finding a way to successfully pull that off will require some commitment and creativity.

Here are a few suggestions that may help. You can incorporate these ideas into your daily schedule to help get the best night's sleep:

1. **Get up and move**
   Sleep quality improves with even minimal exercise, so get up and move! If you're able to walk or jog outside, the fresh air will do you good — as long as you stay six feet away from your neighbors.

   If you're unable to get outside, that's OK. Gyms, fitness centers and yoga studios are all posting workouts online. You can also come up with your own routine. All you need is 10 to 20 minutes a day to help you rest better. Activity can help burn off excess energy and promote relaxation. It allows you to focus on something that can refresh your brain as well.

   Along with movement, try taking some deep breaths. Slowly breathe in through your nose and then slowly breathe out through your mouth. While you're doing this, concentrate on what you doing. Visualize the air going in and then going out; in with the good and out with the bad! This simple act can also promote relaxation.

   While you're deep breathing, think about an area that really gives your life meaning. Maybe it's the beach or the mountains. It can be your favorite place.

2. **Avoid eating close to bedtime**
   You may be baking or cooking more now that you're practicing social distancing. Good for you! Just try not to eat anything heavy or spicy a few hours before bedtime to give yourself enough time to digest your food. Eating too close to bedtime can cause indigestion or heartburn.

   Try to avoid the following:

   - Citrus fruits, such as oranges and lemons
   - Fatty or fried meals
   - Foods with a lot of heat or spice
   - Trade the cappuccino and Frappuccino in for a "Nap-uccino!" (Frothy warm milk with a touch of Crème-de-Menthe and tiny pinch of sugar.)

   If you're hungry close to bedtime, choose a light healthy snack like some almonds, a small bite of turkey or a small portion of low-fat yogurt.

3. **Be mindful of what you drink**

It might be tempting to have a few glasses of wine before bed to help you relax. You may fall asleep initially, but drinking alcohol can cause you to wake up in the middle of the night. Alcohol also blocks REM sleep, the most restorative phase of sleep.

- If you drink alcohol, have a 3 to 5-ounce glass of wine an hour *before* dinner, and then have water with dinner.
- If you drink tea, carbonated beverages or water at night, be sure to stop drinking about an hour before you plan to go to bed to help avoid those nighttime trips to the bathroom.

4. **Make your sleep area cozy and welcoming**
   Bedrooms are exclusively for sleeping, so make it a haven. Just the act of creating a haven is a tangible reminder of your need to sleep. It's all about retraining the brain.

   Put mobile phones in *Do Not Disturb* mode and turn them facedown or put them on the floor beside the bed. You may need them for emergencies, but you don't want the blue light to disturb your sleep patterns.

   Save binge watching for the couch. If you've been dying to watch that latest TV series, schedule a regular time to watch it on the couch or in a cozy nook. Avoid watching TV or electronic devices in bed.

   Make your bed every day, so you can pull down the covers and get in bed every night. Your bedroom should be quiet and dark with a comfortable temperature. For some folks, restful, soothing background music can be beneficial. The physical act of pulling down the covers is a signal to your inner clock that you're about to go to sleep. You might need a new pillow... perhaps one with more support.

5. **Stay on track**
   Even during these uncertain times, try to stay on a regular sleep schedule. Doing so can give you a sense of some control in an out-of-control situation. Let your friends and family know your goals so they won't call or ring the doorbell.

   - Go to bed at roughly the same time every night and get up at the same time every day.
   - Allow yourself enough time to get at least seven hours of sleep.
   - Get out of bed or read a book to wind down if you don't fall asleep after 20 minutes.
   - Make sure any little furry friends are good to go to avoid any trips outside.

Finally

After being as creative as possible, if you still cannot get enough Zs, check with your primary care provider. Perhaps a short-term sleep aid could do the trick!