



Coronavirus, MS, and You

Sleep Tips

Episode 24

Megan Weigel, DNP, ARNP-C, MSCN: Hey everyone, this is Megan Weigel. I am a nurse practitioner in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, and I would like to give you some tips on sleep during this pandemic of COVID-19 when most of us have just a little bit of a heightened level of anxiety and it may be affecting the quality of our sleep and even the quantity of our sleep. So my first suggestion is to limit your news watching. Some of you may say, "What? Oh my gosh, that is where I get all my information." But I would limit your news watching to looking for information instead of looking for anger or anxiety and that might mean that you watch the news for ten or fifteen minutes twice a day, and that if you need information, first, you check a reliable website like the CDC, the World Health Organization, or the MS Advocacy Organizations for the information that you need.

Megan: My second tip is to limit screen time within the hour before bed and that includes computers, phones, iPads, and televisions. So about an hour before bed, you really want to start to create a calming ritual that settles down your mind and gets it ready for sleep. This might mean that you pick a favorite spot in your house and maybe you grab a book that is calming for you to read. Maybe you do a breathing exercise and I will give you a couple that you can try. Maybe you do some stretching exercises that settle your body down at night or have a cup of chamomile tea if it is not going to cause you to get up and go to the bathroom at night. That would actually be my third recommendation, is that you start a calming bedtime ritual. My fourth might be part of that ritual and that is that you say that you are thankful for something every day. Make a little gratitude list and each night when you are getting ready for bed, you can write something down and look at the other things above it. That might also help calm some of the anxiety that tends to keep us up at night.

Megan: A couple of good breathing exercises to do, one is the four seven eight breath and it is very easy. You inhale to a count of four. You breathe in through your nose 'two, three, four', you hold it for a count of seven 'four, five, six, seven', and then you exhale through your mouth to a count of eight. So inhale, hold, exhale. And you do that two or three times. It settles down your heart, settles down your sympathetic nervous system. It really takes you into a resting state. Another one that is easy to do is to just take a deeper breath and make sure that you are exhaling longer than you are inhaling. So you inhale for a count of three exhale for a count of four or five. If that four seven eight breath seems a little too hard to hold, then just take an inhale and exhale longer. This is something that I do in bed. I actually did it

at four in the morning because I woke up and I was nervous about the day and I had a hard time falling back to sleep. So limit your use of the news to only for useful information, limit your screen time before bed. Make sure that you are off-screen for at least an hour before bed, create a bedtime ritual that is calming for you, and include a gratitude list and institute a breathing exercise that you can use as you are trying to fall asleep, and if you wake up in the middle of the night. I hope this helps. We are all in this together. We are all learning new ways to connect together. We are also learning the importance of connecting with ourselves right now. So be well, wash your hands, flatten the curve, and ask questions. No question is silly right now. Thanks.

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