BSS statement on sleep-related advice during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic

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The Covid-19 pandemic has raised many questions and concerns, some of which impact on sleep. Given the importance of healthy sleep for immune function and well-being, we address some of the most urgent queries in the following points. This advice is broadly applicable across the population, but specific advice for children can also be found at https://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/our-services/hospital/sleep-medicine-department/coronavirus-sleep-tips.aspx and https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-resources-parents-carers.

Government Advice on Covid-19 *(not specific to sleep)*.

- General advice on what to do during the pandemic can be found at https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

- Patients with conditions other than Covid-19 are given particular advice on how to protect themselves. Find out whether you belong to a vulnerable group of patients at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#what-do-we-mean-by-extremely-vulnerable.

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be used by health and social care workers wherever it is needed, in accordance with the following guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe.

- If you care for someone or work in the community then the following recommendations on PPE are given by Public Health England https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877599/T2_Recommended_PPE_for_primary_outpatient_and_community_care_by_setting_poster.pdf.

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Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA)

- If you have been diagnosed with OSA and have no symptoms of an infection then continue to use your treatment as intended (typically continuous positive airway pressure, CPAP).

- If you develop symptoms and usually use CPAP when asleep then consider whether anyone in your household is put at risk by this, as CPAP can generate an aerosol that might spread the virus.

- Patients with symptoms of Covid-19 infection should ideally use a different room to other household members, although this may not be possible.

- If you think that you cannot use CPAP during a Covid-19 infection, either because you put others at risk or because of difficulties when using it (e.g. coughing), then stopping the CPAP until symptoms improve might be the sensible thing to do. However, you might experience over the next week that OSA related symptoms re-occur and you should continue with your treatment as soon as the infection is over. If you are proposing to stop using CPAP during an infection, you should first discuss this with your care provider where reasonably possible, by phone or e-mail.

- If you present to hospital, they may have different arrangements to protect staff and other patients and it may not be possible to use your own CPAP device during the pandemic. You should take yours with you, however, in case you are asked to use it.

- Further guidance from the OSA Alliance can be found on the British Thoracic Society webpage https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/media/455098/osa-alliance-cpap-covid-19-advice-20-3-20-v10.pdf.

Insomnia

- If you find it difficult to get to sleep, wake up for long periods in the middle of the night or wake earlier than you need to in the morning, you may be suffering from insomnia. For most people this will be a temporary condition and you should be able to treat it yourself using the advice at https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/.

- Avoid the temptation to self-medicate for insomnia using alcohol. Although it may feel like it helps you get to sleep, in fact it will interfere with your sleep, reducing the amount of REM sleep you obtain and waking you up in the middle of the night. Try to avoid beverages containing alcohol or caffeine for the six hours before bed.

- Periods of lockdown and self-isolation necessary to control the spread of Covid-19 mean that you may have to remain indoors for prolonged periods. It is important in

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this situation to continue to get regular exercise and daylight exposure each day, which will help you get to sleep. You should aim to get at least 75 minutes of vigorous exercise (such as aerobics or climbing stairs) or 150 minutes of moderate exercise (such as brisk walking) each week. Please respect social distancing during any exercise and follow the latest government guidelines in regard to leaving your home. There are many good online videos and live exercise sessions on YouTube which you can join in.

- During this time, you may also find yourself spending more time online or using electronic devices. To prevent these from interfering with sleep, use the low blue light filter during the evening and try to stop using the device at least an hour before bed.

Stress and Anxiety

- The Covid-19 pandemic is understandably causing a lot of anxiety for many people. This anxiety can lead to problems getting to sleep and periods of lying awake worrying. If you are worrying about the Covid-19 disorder, we suggest that you look at the 10 tips outlined here: https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/.

- When anxiety reaches a high level it can turn into a panic disorder. If you feel you are approaching this level, we suggest you try some of the NHS recommended treatments at https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-panic/.

- Similarly, the pandemic and the societal changes needed to combat it are leading to high levels of stress for some individuals, such as frontline health and care workers or food supply workers. If you find yourself affected by stress, this may impact upon your sleep. You can combat stress through techniques such a breathing exercises as well as utilising family and peer support: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/.

- You may find it helpful to practice mindfulness techniques at bedtime to help you sleep: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/. Techniques specifically designed to help you address concerns about the Covid-19 situation have also been developed and are available at: https://www.actmindfully.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FACE-COVID-eBook-by-Russ-Harris-March-2020.pdf. NHS workers can also get free access to Sleepio, Unmind, Daylight and Headspace apps to help with your mental health.

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- If you find that your stress and anxiety are becoming unmanageable even when practising self-help measures, contact your GP practice by phone to see what psychological support services are currently available in your area. During a period of lockdown, such support is likely to be limited to telephone and videolink services but these can still be of benefit to you.

If you have urgent medical need related to an acute Covid-19 infection then call 111, <u>only</u> in life-threatening emergencies call 999. Before you call please consider whether your query is urgent, as phone lines will be exceptionally busy during these times and other users may not get through if you have a less urgent request. If you require less urgent Covid-19 information, it is better to consult the advice on the NHS website: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/**.**

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