Insomnia Is On The Rise. Here Are 5 Tips To Sleep Better During The Pandemic

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Insomnia is on the rise in the Chicago area, according to one local sleep expert, who blames elevated stress from health and financial anxiety caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Dr. Lisa Medalie, a behavioral sleep medicine specialist at the University of Chicago, offered tips five to sleep better and, in turn, boost the immune system.

Set boundaries with electronics

As soon as people start having a little trouble falling asleep, the first thing they do is look at their phone to distract themselves, Medalie said.

But that's a mistake

The blue spectrum light that projects from electronic devices tells the brain to stop producing the sleep hormone melatonin.

Medalie recommends putting all devices away at least an hour before bed.

Use deep breathing exercises

Medalie recommends learning how to practice diaphragmatic breathing by putting your hands on your stomach, slowly inhaling through your nose and holding the breath for two seconds. Then, slowly push the air out your mouth.

The practice can be used to fall asleep or to reduce stress, she said.

Make your bedroom conducive to sleep

Medalie said bedrooms should be cool, with no light or noise.

She suggested using an eye mask or blackout shades to block light and a white noise machine to block extraneous noise from the streets or the hallway.

Build structure in your day

Daily routines have been disrupted, and Medaline said creating structure will help you cope with the breakdown of regular life.

"People thrive on structure. We need it," she said. "What time are you going to have your meals? What time are you going to take a break? And then, most importantly, schedule a specific bedtime and specific wake time."

Figure out your "sleep needs"

Not everyone needs eight hours of sleep — some people need more and some less.

To figure out how much sleep you need, Medaline suggests spending a week sleeping six hours per night and rate your energy level and focus level. Then, spend a week getting seven hours and compare the ratings.