

COVID-19: The Importance of Sleep

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Presently, much of the world's media and social focus is, understandably, dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the backdrop of high-speed developments and the evolving global situation, we are all experiencing changes to daily routines, social and financial infrastructures - and direct health consequences due to the virus. These changes can often be accompanied by increased stress and fear. Importantly, the impact on sleep is a pressing public health concern [1,2].

A wealth of evidence demonstrates the negative effects of poor sleep on health ranging from increased risks of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, depression, anxiety [3,4] and direct impacts on the immune system [5]. Additionally, we know that a proportion of those with acute sleep problems may develop chronic sleep problems [6].

Our knowledge of COVID-19 and sleep is constantly evolving as data and studies are regularly published. COVID-19 has resulted in a significant increase in insomnia prevalence, mental health problems and sleep disturbance [7-9]. The virus has also profoundly impacted the way we treat and diagnose existing sleep problems [10] particularly with sleep related breathing disorders [11]. The considerable overlap with risk factors and co-morbidities for obstructive sleep apnoea and poor outcome with COVID-19 suggests that addressing these sleep problems may also reduce the mortality from the virus.

Despite this knowledge, we still do not understand several facets of sleep and COVID-19. Ignoring the acute and chronic sleep problems during this pandemic would be indefensible given the accumulating evidence. Further, there is sparse data regarding the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on sleep. Does COVID-19 have long term impacts on sleep? Does it affect breathing at night and so affect our sleep at night in previously healthy? The studies on sleep related breathing disorders and COVID-19 seem to illustrate complex a relationship and studies may help us optimise patient care to this vulnerable group.

Current recommendations are mainly based on pre-existing evidence for the treatment of sleep disorders [12]. However, with further knowledge, we may be able to refine our strategies and for different population groups. In addition, we may find that sleep has a direct impact on the course of the virus itself, given how sleep and immune function work in tandem.

Further, high quality studies are required to enhance our insight into the treatment and prevention of sleep problems during this time. We eagerly await the results of large, high quality studies, such as the International COVID-19 Sleep Study, which may provide answers to some of these questions and help guide future treatment. We should

encourage health policy makers to seriously consider the role sleep has to play in society at this time.

Conflicts of Interest

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