

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Diminished social interactions

Reduced physical activity

Reduced sunlight exposure

More time spent on social media

Higher anxiety levels and mood disturbances



- **Sleep onset and awakening times have been delayed** by about 1 hour
- The **time needed to fall asleep has increased**, probably because of increased levels of worry and pre-sleep ruminations

- We spend **more time using social media**, specially during the 2 hours immediately before going to sleep
- Exposure to light sources such as phone screens or PCs in the evening suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone that has a crucial role in sleep regulation
- In addition, this can be a source of stress due to the continuous exposure to news feed just before bed, a factor that could contribute to the increased latency of falling asleep



Compared to the pre-covid period, studies based on self-reported questionnaires show that **severe symptoms of insomnia** (14% vs 5%) and **poor rest quality** (60% vs 30%) have greatly increased. The most affected ones seem to be:

- **women**,
- **workers** who couldn't pursue their job in smart-working modality,
- people with **late chronotypes**, who tend to be more active in the evening.

SOME USEFUL ADVICE ...

- Stick to your pre-covid sleep and wake schedules
- Exercise regularly
- Expose yourself to sunlight, which act as a regulator of the natural circadian rhythm
- Choose relaxing activities (e.g. reading a book, practicing yoga,...) instead of using the internet before going to bed



These findings correlate with reported levels of anxiety and depression, which predispose to sleep problems.

... and what about our dreams?

As the pandemic affects our psychological well-being and our sleep, this crisis context is also noticeable in our dreaming lives.

- **Continuity hypothesis:** waking-life emotions, thoughts and events seem to shape our dreams. Therefore, higher increases in perceived stress and anxiety go hand in hand with higher dream content variations and stronger emotional (predominantly negative) tone.
- **Threat-simulation hypothesis:** this hypothesis claims that dreaming allows for a riskless confrontation to potential negative life events, providing a safe playground to train our reactions against possible threats.



Compared to the pre-covid period, we **recall more dreams** and we have **more nightmares**. Dream reports are **longer, more realistic, more emotional**, and depict **more vivid sensory impressions**.

People most affected by the pandemic showed highest increases in dream recall, negative dream emotions, and incorporation rates of Covid-19 related elements.

The most common dream themes and imagery are:

- Loss of control, frustration, powerlessness
- Negative emotional tone (anger, sadness)
- Covid-19 (virus, cleanness, contamination)
- Head and face related content
- Food
- Animals
- Abrupt location changes



Observing our dream content may be beneficial:

- Dream sharing may foster **social interaction and interpersonal bonding**
- It can touch upon fears and emotions that we may not be fully aware of during wakefulness, allowing us to **confront and cope** with them
- Emotional tone of dreams may be used as **an indicator of general mood and mental health state**

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