

Coping With Sleep Difficulties During Cancer

Trouble sleeping, or insomnia, is common for those in treatment and after treatment has ended. Many things can cause difficulty sleeping, but there are ways to help. This fact sheet will discuss:

- Good habits for sleeping
- Talking with your health care team
- Relaxation techniques



Ways to Get the Best Sleep Possible

There are many reasons why it is hard to sleep. These can include everything from drinking caffeine to fears related to cancer. Here are a few suggestions to help cope with insomnia:

Try getting into a bedtime routine. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time. Consistency may help your body.

Avoid screen time before bed. Set a time limit for watching TV, using a computer or smart phone before bed. Putting devices away thirty minutes before bed has proven to help sleep.

Create the right environment. At bedtime, make sure clocks are not visible. This can help you feel at ease and less anxious about time. Keeping your room dim and quiet may also help.

Try not to nap during the day. Not sleeping at night may cause you to feel tired during the day. While a nap might be tempting, try to stay awake until bedtime. This might help you fall asleep better.

Be mindful of your fluid intake. Caffeine and alcohol can keep you awake. Try to avoid caffeine after noon. Drink plenty of water during the day but try to cut back before going to bed.



Talk With Your Health Care Team

Tell your doctor and health care team. Good communication can help you get a better night's rest. Here are some questions you might consider:

- Are there medical reasons for my insomnia?
- Can I use any medication to help me sleep? Will my insurance cover it?
- Do you recommend any exercises that can reduce stress?
- Should I make changes to my diet?

A health care journal can be helpful. Writing down changes in your routines can help in many ways. For example, what you eat and when, the times of day you feel stressed or when you feel especially tired. A journal or notebook allows you to see patterns of insomnia. It can also help with other side effects and feelings.



Ways to Help You Relax

A cancer diagnosis and treatment are extremely hard to experience. Your mind may never be settled. You may worry quite a bit. Relaxation practices can calm your mind, which can help you sleep. Here are some practices that can help:

Yoga. This technique connects the mind and the body by combining breathing, relaxation and meditation exercises. Talk to your doctor before engaging in this physical activity. To learn more about yoga, read CancerCare's fact sheet titled "Cancer and Yoga."

Mindful meditation. When you use mindful meditation, you focus on your breath while noticing your thoughts without judging them as good or bad. Think about what you sense and feel in the moment. When you feel anxious or worries, gently bring your focus back to your breath.

Guided imagery. Guided imagery is a stress-reduction technique that combines deep breathing and meditation. As you breathe deeply, imagine a peaceful setting, perhaps one you know well. Once you are relaxed, you can create a 'wakeful dream' where you might imagine pain being washed away or your body becoming stronger.

CancerCare has more information on relaxation in our fact sheet titled "Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices: Coping with Cancer."

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include resource navigation, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

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