



CANCERcare®

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COPING WITH SLEEPING DIFFICULTIES DURING AND AFTER TREATMENT

Insomnia, or trouble sleeping, is common for those going through treatment or remission. There are many factors that cause an individual to have difficulties sleeping that should be discussed with your health care team.

COPING WITH INSOMNIA

Individuals have trouble sleeping for different reasons including caffeine intake or fear of recurrence. 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 TV, computers, tablets and smart phones before bed. Limiting time watching TV, writing emails or using a smart phone before bed can help. Eliminating “screen time” an hour or two before bed has proven to be helpful for many individuals.

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



Try not to nap during the day. Trouble sleeping at night can cause you to feel tired and fatigued throughout the day. Even though a nap is tempting, try avoiding naps during the day.

Be mindful of your fluid intake.

Caffeine and alcohol can keep you awake or disrupt your sleep. Try avoiding caffeine after noon. Drink plenty of water during the day but try to cut back before going to bed. For more tips to relax at bedtime, read CancerCare’s fact sheet titled “Difficulty Sleeping: Tips to Relax Before Bedtime.”

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

When your world is turned upside down by a cancer diagnosis, it’s common to feel like your mind is racing. Relaxation practices can help calm your mind when you want to fall asleep. Here are some techniques that may help you relax:

Yoga. This relaxation 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. Using mindful meditation, focus on your breath while non-judgmentally looking at your thoughts when your mind wanders, especially thoughts of worry. When you feel anxious, gently bring your focus back to your breath.

Guided imagery. When feelings like anxiety emerge, it can be helpful to practice guided imagery, which is a stress-reduction technique combining deep breathing and meditation. As you practice deep breathing, imagine a peaceful scene or setting, perhaps from a memory. Once you are relaxed, you can create a “wakeful dream” in which, for example, you envision pain being washed away or your body becoming stronger.

Read CancerCare’s fact sheet titled “Relaxation Techniques and Mind/Body Practices: How They Can Help You Cope With Cancer” for more information on meditation and guided imagery.

TALK TO YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Any changes you experience during or after treatment, including insomnia, should be addressed by your health care team. Good communication with your doctor will help you get a better night’s rest and improve the quality of the care you receive. Here are questions you may want to consider asking your doctor if you having troubling sleeping:

- What is causing my insomnia?
- What is the best treatment for my insomnia and will my insurance cover it?
- I feel fatigue but I can’t sleep. What changes can I make to improve this?
- Can I reduce the feeling of fatigue during the day? Do you recommend any exercises I can do to reduce stress?
- Should I change my diet?

Keeping a health care journal can be helpful. If you experience a change in your sleep patterns or any treatment side effects, start a health care journal. Having a journal or notebook will allow you to keep all of your health information in one place. If you are experiencing insomnia, it may be helpful write down the following in your journal or notebook:

- When you first experienced sleeplessness
- If and when you slept, the duration and the environment that you slept in
- Your diet
- Bedtime routine
- Any trouble or changes in breathing
- How you feel while awake
- Any physical activities you engaged in

Have this journal with you any time that you talk to your health care team.

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 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.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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