

## GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

It is very common for cancer patients to experience problems sleeping. This can be due to illness problems such as pain, treatment problems such as nausea or arousal from medication, or psychological problems such as worry.

There are a number of simple rules to follow to improve your sleeping. Mostly they involve modifying your behaviour to teach your body new rules about when and how it sleeps.

### Things to do during the day

1. **Establish a daily routine.** Get up at the same time every day, as soon as the alarm goes off. Do this no matter how little sleep you have had during the night. You should also have the next few tasks planned the same every day so you establish a pattern for how your day begins.
2. Set aside time in your daily routine to use your **problem-solving and goal-setting** skills to deal with any worries you have. Do not put this off as it will come back to trouble you during the night!
3. Include **daily exercise** in your routine. The level of exercise will depend on your fitness and health. Make sure you have finishing exercising by the time the sun goes down.
4. **Avoid daytime naps.** They mean you are less sleepy at night, which makes you more tired the next day, which makes you likely to have a nap, and so the vicious cycle continues! If you are experiencing cancer-related fatigue, you may need to have a nap in the afternoon, but this must be no longer than 30 minutes, and you should attempt to exercise for the same amount of time earlier in the day.
5. **Avoid stimulants** such as caffeine and nicotine; they make it harder to go to sleep. No more than two cups of coffee a day and none after 4pm, and no cigarettes close to bedtime. Remember that tea, chocolate and energy drinks contain caffeine.
6. **Avoid excessive alcohol.** It may relax you and make it easier to fall asleep, but it affects your sleep quality as you wake more often during the night and miss deep sleep. If you routinely use alcohol to get to sleep it will become less and less effective, and will increase your anxiety the following day.
7. **Avoid regular use of sleeping pills.** They are an appropriate way to manage temporary sleep difficulties, such as you might experience if you have to take steroids with your chemo. However, you should not take them for more than two or three days in a row and then have as many nights without them. The more you use them, the less effective they become. Your sleep gets worse, and it becomes harder to stop taking them.

### Things to do at night

1. **You should only go to be when you are sleepy.** Establishing a winding down routine, beginning about 30 minutes before you go to bed, can help this. Things you might do include having a warm bath or shower, relaxing by listening to music, watching television or reading a book, as long as it isn't a thriller or too exciting. The idea is to wind down, not wind up! Some people find a snack of banana and a glass of milk (warmed and then honey added) helps them to relax.
2. **Your bedroom is only for sleep and sex.** You need to teach your body that this is where it sleeps, not works, watches television or talks about the day.

3. **You need to make sure the room is comfortable.** Check that the temperature is not too hot or too cold. If you often wake with pain, make sure you have your pain medication and a glass of water next to the bed.
4. **Reduce light** as much as possible by shutting doors and curtains. This will prevent your body from waking up when the sun rises.
5. **Reduce noise** as much as possible by closing windows and doors, even using earplugs if necessary.
6. **Reduce other stimuli** that may disturb your sleep, such as pets, ticking clocks and brightly lit clocks.
7. **If you wake up worrying, keep a blank notepad and pen next to the bed.** When you wake up, write down the worry and plan to deal with it in the morning. Try to go back to sleep. If this does not work, get out of bed and do something relaxing but distracting, such as listening to music. While you are not sleeping, you are at least resting and will not feel tired in the morning. When you feel sleepy again go back to bed. If you lie in bed worrying, you will only exhaust yourself physically and emotionally.

**Extracted from:** Adams, Catherine, 'Coping with Common Concerns' in Hodgkinson, Dr Katharine; Gilchrist, Dr Jemma (eds), *Psychosocial Care of Cancer Patients: A Health Professional's Guide to What to Say and Do*, Ausmed Publications (2008, Melbourne), 84, 85.

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