Getting Help for Sleep Problems

Sleep problems can be any change in your usual sleeping habits. You may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. This is called insomnia. If you are getting cancer treatment, you may get tired more easily and may need more sleep. There are many things that can cause sleep problems. Some of these are pain, anxiety, worry, depression, night sweats, side effects of treatment or medicines, and overnight hospital stays.

Sleep problems can do many things:

- Make pain worse
- Increase your chance of depression
- Affect your memory
- Make it hard to think clearly
- Make tiredness (fatigue) worse
- Make your immune system weaker

Sleep problems can make everyday living harder, too.

- They can make you unable to go to work or school.
- They can make it hard for you to take care of yourself and your family.

You need good sleep.

Getting a good night's sleep:

- Gives you a better outlook on the day
- Refreshes you
- Keeps you from being cranky
- Helps you do the things you need to do – like going to the doctor and keeping up with your treatment plan

Talk to your health care team about any sleep problems you have so they can help you.

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What you can do to get better sleep:

Anytime

- ✔ Sleep as much as your body tells you to.
- ✔ Use your bed only for sleep and sex. Do not read or watch TV in bed.
- ✔ Talk with your doctor or nurse about things you can do to help you relax.
- ✔ Get up at the same time each day.

During the Day

- ✔ Try to exercise at least once a day. Do this at least 2 to 3 hours before bedtime.
- ✔ Rest in a quiet place for the same amount of time each day.
- ✔ Limit daytime naps to early in the day – not near bedtime.
- ✔ Think and talk about worries and fears early in the day, not at bedtime.

At Bedtime

- ✔ Avoid drinks with caffeine 6 to 8 hours before bedtime.
- ✔ Avoid alcoholic drinks in the late evening. They can keep you awake as they "wear off."
- ✔ Drink warm, caffeine-free drinks, like warm milk with honey or decaf tea, before bedtime.
- ✔ Take sleeping medicine or pain relievers at the same time each night.
- ✔ Have someone give you backrubs or massage your feet before bedtime.
- ✔ Go to bed when you feel sleepy and try to go to bed at about the same time each night.
- ✔ Keep sheets clean, neatly tucked in, and as wrinkle-free as possible.
- ✔ Create a quiet place for sleep.
- ✔ Create a bedtime routine, like reading or taking a warm bath, before going to bed.
- ✔ Use deep-breathing exercises to help you relax.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about your sleep problems.

Tell them about:

- Your daytime and nighttime sleep habits
- The amount of exercise you get each day
- All medicines you are taking right now

This information will help your doctor or nurse know what is causing your sleep problem. And once the cause is found, your sleep problem can most likely be treated with success.

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