



Getting Help for Sleep Problems

If you're getting cancer treatment, you may get tired more easily and may need more sleep. Sleep problems can be common in cancer patients. You might hear these called sleep disturbances or sleep-wake disturbances. Any change in usual sleeping habits can affect you in different ways and affect your ability to do everyday activities.

It's important to remember that everyone is different. But sleep is key to having good physical and mental health, and for your mood and well-being. Because of this, having a good sleep routine or good sleep hygiene is important.

Common sleep problems for people with cancer

- Feeling overly weak and more tired than usual, or feeling the need to rest and sleep more (fatigue)
- Having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep (insomnia)
- Getting too much sleep, which might affect your activities during the day
- Taking too many naps during the day, which might affect your sleep at night
- Being too hot or cold, needing to use the bathroom, sleep-walking, nightmares, or sleep terrors.

Sometimes changes in sleep are temporary, while others may last several months to years after cancer treatment.

Sleep problems can lead to lower energy levels.

- 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.
- They can affect your enjoyment of social activities or hobbies.

What causes sleep problems?

- Certain surgeries, radiation therapy, treatment drugs or hormone therapy
- Medications related to cancer and non-cancer conditions
- Side effects related to cancer, cancer treatment, or medications, which might include:
 - Fatigue
 - Pain
 - Anxiety and worrying
 - Depression
 - Fever
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Heartburn
 - Leg cramps
 - Night sweats or hot flashes
 - Shortness of breath

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

Managing sleep problems

Lab tests, such as a sleep study, or x-rays might help find what might be causing your sleep problem. But most of the time, diagnosing a sleep problem depends on the patient reporting it.

Your doctor may give you a form or checklist to fill out about your sleep habits.

Because sleep problems in people with cancer usually have more than one cause, doctors, nurses, sleep specialists, social workers, therapists, pharmacists, dietitians and nutritionists, and a number of other professionals might be involved in helping manage them. You might hear this referred to as having a sleep hygiene plan.

What you can do to have a good sleep hygiene plan

Keep a sleep diary. You can track your sleep by keeping a record of the time and patterns of your sleep and naps. Include anything special you might notice when you first wake up or if you remember anything that might be different from a usual routine. A person who is with you at home or during the night can help describe these, too.

- Get up at the same time each day.
- Take your medications at the same time every day, and make sure your health care team knows the schedule for them.
- Do not drink caffeine for at least 6 to 8 hours before bedtime – longer if it affects your sleep.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Use a quiet setting for rest at the same time each day.
- Take short daytime naps if needed (less than an hour) to avoid interfering with nighttime sleep.
- Keep sheets clean.
- Create a bedtime routine, like reading or taking a warm bath, before going to bed.



Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. You might be able to cope better with their support and understanding.

Talk to your health care team

Tell your health care team about your sleep changes. Let them know when you notice the changes, what you have trouble with, or things that make your sleep worse or better.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **www.cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.



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