

# What to Do for Sleep Problems

Many people with cancer have trouble sleeping. But sleep is key to good physical and mental health, and for your mood and well-being. That's why having a good sleep routine or good sleep hygiene is important.



## What causes sleep problems?

There are many reasons why people with cancer have sleep problems. Some of these reasons are related to cancer, but some are not.

Some things that can cause sleep problems include:

- Certain cancer treatments, including some surgeries, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy
- Some medicines used to manage cancer and non-cancer conditions
- Anxiety, worry, or depression
- Your daytime habits, such as not getting enough physical activity during the day
- Side effects of cancer or its treatment, such as:
  - Pain
  - Fever
  - Nausea and vomiting
  - Heartburn
  - Leg cramps
  - Night sweats or hot flashes
  - Shortness of breath



## What are some common sleep problems?

Some common sleep problems in people with cancer include:

- Feeling the need to rest and sleep more
- Having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep (insomnia)
- Getting too much sleep, which might affect what you can do 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

Sleep changes may be temporary, or they may last months to years after cancer treatment.

**Trouble sleeping can affect many parts of your life. It might make it hard for you to:**

- Take care of yourself and your family
- Enjoy social activities or hobbies



## How are sleep problems treated?

Sleep problems can be very different for each person. Start by describing your symptoms to your cancer care team. That will help them figure out the best way to treat your problem.

Your cancer care team might suggest that you meet with a sleep specialist. A sleep specialist may be able to help you figure out why you're having trouble sleeping. Ask your cancer care team about a referral, if needed.

Some common ways to treat cancer-related sleep problems include:

- Treatment of side effects from cancer or cancer treatment
- Cognitive behavioral therapy to help you feel less anxious about sleep
- Relaxation methods like focused breathing, meditation, or mindfulness
- Medicines



## What can you do to help improve your sleep?

There are many things you can do to help manage your sleep problems, including:

- Keep a sleep diary. Tracking your sleep and wake times, patterns, and naps might give you clues about what is causing your sleep problems. A person who is with you at home or during the night can help describe these, too.
- Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day.
- Try to exercise at least once a day. Even a short walk might help.
- Avoid caffeine after mid-afternoon – even earlier if it affects your sleep.
- Avoid alcohol and nicotine.
- Use a quiet setting for rest at the same time each day.

- Take short daytime naps if needed (30 minutes or less) to decrease the effect on your nighttime sleep.
- Keep sheets clean, tucked in, and as free from wrinkles as you can.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine, like reading or taking a warm bath.



## When to talk with your cancer care team

Tell your cancer care team about your sleep problems. Your team will ask you questions about your sleep habits to help find out what is causing the problems. They will want to know when you notice the changes, what you have trouble with, and what makes your sleep worse or better. This information will help the cancer care team find the cause of your sleep problems and help come up with a plan to improve your sleep.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/sleepproblems](https://cancer.org/sleepproblems) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

