

MANAGING INSOMNIA FOR PATIENTS WITH CANCER

Insomnia is a common sleep disorder and marked by difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up earlier than intended.

You may have a hard time sleeping because of:

- Pain, hot flashes, frequent urination, or other side effects from your cancer and its treatment
- Unhealthy sleep habits
- Fear and worry about your cancer and treatment

There are many things that are in your control to help you get better sleep. They fall into three categories: medical, behavioral, and psychological.



MEDICAL STRATEGIES

- Talk with your health care provider about any physical side effects that are interrupting your sleep so you can work together to address these factors.
- Talk with your health care provider about your prescription medications. Sometimes changing a medication or the timing you take them can improve sleep. For example, if you take prednisone, you may need to take it earlier in the day.
- There are medications to help one sleep, but these are not recommended for long-term use and can leave you feeling groggy the next day. Try the behavioral strategies first to see if they help you.

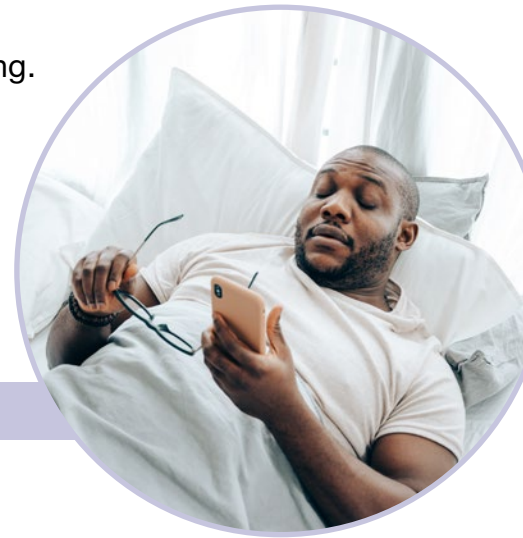
BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES

SLEEP SCHEDULE

- Keep the same wake time every day, even on the weekends. When you wake up at different times every day, you are essentially “jet-lagging” your body, which confuses your internal body clock.
- Set aside 30 minutes before bed for a wind-down bedtime routine. Try different things and see what works for you.
- Only go to bed when you are sleepy. Sleepy means you are having a hard time staying awake (e.g., your eyes are closing). Sometimes when we have trouble sleeping, we start getting into bed earlier and earlier even when not sleepy, but this can actually hinder good sleep.
- Minimize naps. If you are going to take a nap, keep it short (~30 minutes) and take it earlier in the day (before late afternoon).

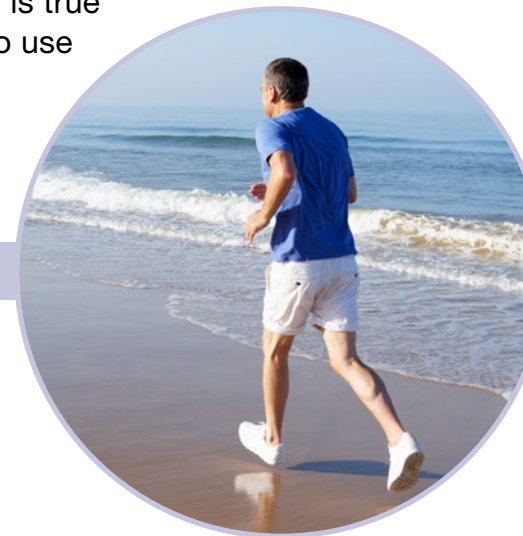
YOUR BEDROOM AND ENVIRONMENT

- Optimize your bedroom environment for sleep. Keep the room comfortable, dark, quiet, and cool (use earplugs or an eye mask if needed). Make the bed as comfortable as possible such as sleeping on a comfortable mattress and pillow and using the right amount of blankets to make you comfortable (not too hot or cold).
- If you can't sleep after 15-20 minutes, don't stay in bed. Get out of bed and read a book or do something else relaxing in another room or in a chair. Stay there until you feel sleepy. Then go back to bed.
- Reduce blue light exposure in the evening by wearing glasses to block blue light and downloading an app to block blue light on your electronic devices (laptop, tablet, or smartphone). Avoid watching TV or using any screens about 30 minutes-1 hour before bed.
- Turn off bright lights in your home as you wind down for the evening.
- If you have hot flashes at night, you can try the following:
 - ◇ Keep the room cool with a fan or air conditioning
 - ◇ Wear layers (especially clothing that is made of natural fibers like cotton), so that you can take them off at night if needed
 - ◇ Use cooling sheets or cooling pillows



FOOD AND DRINK

- Avoid caffeine after the morning, and especially 6-8 hours before bed. If you are craving an afternoon or evening coffee, stick with decaffeinated coffee.
- Avoid eating large meals before bed. Eating certain meals and snacks a few hours before bed may help, such as a high-protein snack about two hours before you go to sleep.
- Avoid foods or drinks that can trigger hot flashes (e.g., spicy foods, hot drinks).
- Avoid large amounts of liquids 1-2 hours before going to bed. This is true especially if you have to wake up often in the middle of the night to use the bathroom.
- Minimize alcohol consumption. Alcohol may help you fall asleep, but it can cause you to wake up during the night.



EXERCISE

- Exercise regularly, and daily, if possible, for a good night's sleep.
- There is a stimulatory effect of exercise, which can cause sleep problems for some but not all people. Try to finish your exercise earlier in the day if evening exercise affects your sleep.

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

- Try meditating, deep breathing, gentle yoga, or stretching before going to bed to calm your mind.
- Keep a pen and paper next to you so you can write down things in the middle of the night if needed. That way, you are ready to tackle them when you wake up the next day.
- If you find that worry is getting in the way of your ability to sleep, you can schedule a specific time (e.g., for 30 minutes at 3 PM) earlier in the day to just worry. Therefore, if a worry comes up at another time, you can jot it down and tell yourself “I’ll worry about that during my worry time.”
- You can also try reading a book, listening to relaxing music, or engaging in other activities that help your body to relax and your mind to wind down for the night.
- Try taking a hot bath or soaking just your feet one hour before going to bed to help you relax.



If the problem of insomnia persists, please talk to your health care provider about a referral to a sleep specialist.

TIPS FOR HEALTHY SLEEP

✓ YES



GET UP AT THE SAME TIME



EXERCISE



BEDTIME ROUTINE



COMFORTABLE BED



COOL AND DARK ROOM



RELAXATION EXERCISES

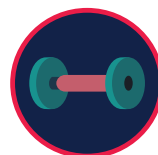
✗ NO



HEAVY FOOD



BLUE LIGHT



LATE NIGHT EXERCISE



ALCOHOL AND SMOKING



CAFFEINE



LONG NAPS

MYTHS ABOUT SLEEP

#1: I NEED TO GET 8 HOURS OF SLEEP

The amount of sleep each person needs to function at their best varies from person to person. Eight hours of sleep per night is just an average. Some people only need seven hours and others may need nine hours. There is no magic number that works for every person.

#2: I SHOULDN'T BE WAKING UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Waking up for short periods of time in the middle of the night is normal. Most adults wake up multiple times in the night but may or may not remember it.

#3: INSOMNIA IS UNTREATABLE

Even if you have had insomnia for years, it doesn't mean there isn't hope. There are a number of things that have been found to treat insomnia. If you try the strategies presented here and still have sleep problems, please talk to your healthcare provider. They may be able to refer you to a type of therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, which has proven quite effective in treating even chronic insomnia.

INSOMNIA CHECKLIST

Do you have the following?

- A sleep difficulty (only need to have one of these)
 - Difficulty getting to sleep at the beginning of the night
 - Difficulty maintaining sleep, characterized by frequent awakenings or problems returning to sleep after awakenings
 - Early-morning awakenings with inability to return to sleep
- Sleep difficulty occurs at least 3 nights per week
- Sleep difficulty is present for at least 3 months



If you have checked all three, then you may have insomnia. Please reach out to your healthcare provider to discuss any chronic sleep problems.

SHARED AUTHORSHIP

Neha Goyal, PhD

Staff Psychologist

Psycho-oncology Department, UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

Hala Borno, MD

Genitourinary Medical Oncologist

Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine and Division of Hematology/Oncology

Sylvia Zhang, MS, CCRP

Senior Clinical Research Coordinator

UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

Stacey A. Kenfield, ScD

Helen Diller Family Chair in Population Science for Urologic Cancer

Associate Professor, Departments of Urology and Epidemiology & Biostatistics

University of California, San Francisco