

Tips for Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Healthy sleep is important to maintaining physical and mental health. Unfortunately, sleep disturbances are very common among people newly diagnosed with and/or being treated for cancer. Sleep hygiene, or healthy lifestyle behaviors that support sleep, can help you get a better night's rest.

What can cause sleep problems for people with cancer?

Sleep problems related to cancer and cancer treatment can be caused by hormonal changes, side effects of certain medications, pain, anxiety, worry, and stress.

Why is sleep important?

During sleep, the body is doing important work to maintain the immune, cardiovascular, metabolic, and musculoskeletal systems. Sleep is also important for brain health, memory, learning and problem-solving ability.

How much sleep do I need?

Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep a night.

Sleep Hygiene: Tips to help improve sleep habits

Bedroom Environment: Your Sleep Oasis

- Use your bedroom for sleeping only. You may want to avoid screens such as computers, phones, tablets, and television.
- Use low lights and keep the room a comfortably cool temperature.
- Wear light bedclothes and turn on a fan if you experience hot flashes.
- Use relaxing scents such as lavender, bergamot, chamomile or cedarwood.
- Play calming music as you wind down for sleep.

Diet

- Limit caffeine to before mid-day. It can take several hours for your body to clear it.
- Eat foods during the day that may help support sleep:
 - high fiber (such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains), cherries, magnesium rich foods (pumpkin seeds, cashews, almonds, spinach, tofu, avocado) and foods with tryptophan (salmon, poultry, eggs, spinach, seeds, soy).

Food	Portion	Caffeine Content
Black coffee	8oz	100mg
Espresso	1oz	60mg
Black tea	8oz	50mg
Green tea	8oz	30mg
70% Dark chocolate	1 oz	20mg
Milk chocolate	1oz	6mg



- Do not eat 3 hours before bedtime. A light snack such as fruit, milk or nondairy milk drink is ok. Do not have anything heavy or spicy.

Exercise

- Be physically active during the day. Try to avoid sitting in one place more than an hour without getting up to walk or stretch.
- If working at a desk, try a standing desk or set an hourly alarm to remind you to move.
- Do not do any vigorous exercise for three hours before bedtime.
- During the day get outside! Exposure to sunlight, especially in the morning, can help regulate your sleep/wake cycle.
- Try mindfulness practices in the evening – yoga stretches, deep breathing, meditation, puzzles or journaling can help you relax and reduce anxiety.
- Be consistent with wake time schedule and note in the evening when you begin to feel sleepy. Make sure to include wind down time before going to bed at night.

Trouble shooting:

- If you have trouble falling asleep or back asleep, try not to look at the clock. If you are tossing and turning or “trying” to sleep without success, it’s ok to get up and out of bed for a little while and do something quieting like gentle stretches or reading, before going back to bed for sleep.
- If you must take a nap in the afternoon, limit it to no more than 30 minutes.

Communication

- Talk with your partner, family or housemates about your plan to improve your sleep so that they can help support you!
- Talk with your treatment team. They may be able to prescribe you medication or refer you to a sleep specialist.

Certain sleep disorders such as sleep apnea or insomnia require more comprehensive treatment and should be managed by a healthcare provider or sleep specialist.

Mass General Cancer Center Resources:

Lifestyle Medicine Clinic: massgeneral.org/cancer/lifestylemedicine

Integrative Therapies Program: massgeneral.org/cancer/integrative-therapies

Sleep Resources:

Sleepfoundation.org sleepassociation.org/

MGH Division of Sleep Medicine: <https://www.massgeneral.org/neurology/treatments-and-services/sleep-division>



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