

Insomnia or Difficulty Sleeping & Cancer

Insomnia and other sleep/wake disturbances are experienced commonly by people with cancer. Some people have trouble falling asleep. Other people wake up during the night and are unable to go back to sleep. Problems sleeping are caused by anxiety, medications, cancer symptoms, and the effects of cancer treatment.

Medications such as Dexamethasone/Decadron® can interfere with sleep. Multiple trips to the bathroom overnight due to the amount of fluid people are asked to drink while receiving chemotherapy can disrupt sleep. Side effects including pain, nausea, shortness of breath, and anxiety, can prevent a good night's sleep.

It is normal for people with cancer to worry about their disease and what it does to their lives and to the lives of friends and family members. It is important to treat insomnia to help improve quality of life.



Methods to reduce insomnia:

- Practice good sleep habits.
 - Go to bed only when you are sleepy.
 - If you do not fall asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and engage in a quiet activity, such as reading.
 - Engage in bedtime rituals (e.g., warm bath, meditation, a light snack) that help you relax and signal your body it's time for sleep.
 - Do not eat, read, write or watch TV while in bed.
 - Limit use of electronic devices before bedtime.
 - Make your bedroom dark, quiet and cool.
 - Eat a high-protein snack (e.g., peanut butter, chicken, cheese, or nuts) 2 hours before bedtime.
 - Drink a warm cup of Original Formula Ovaltine® before bedtime.
 - Do not eat a full meal or exercise 2 hours or less before bedtime.
 - Minimize daytime naps.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Engage in relaxation therapies.
 - Listen to guided meditations or soothing music.
 - Deep breathing.
 - Massage.
 - Progressive muscle relaxation.
 - Aromatherapy; focus on a scented candle.

Medications to treat insomnia:

- Some people find over-the-counter medications helpful:

- Melatonin
 - Diphenhydramine/Benadryl®
 - Tylenol PM®
- Your doctor may prescribe one of these medications as a sleep aid:
 - Zolpidem/Ambien®
 - Eszopiclone/Lunesta®
 - Temazepam/Restoril®

Call your doctor if you experience:

- Unrelieved pain, anxiety, or depression that interferes with sleep.
- No improvement in sleep.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

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NOTE: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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