



Improving Sleep Quality After Cancer

What Do We Mean by Sleeping Difficulties?

Most people have a bad night's sleep from time to time. When this happens every night, it's time to do something.

Sleep patterns are habit-based. Disrupted sleep is upsetting, which makes things worse. The bedroom, and sleep, becomes associated with frustration, annoyance and anxiety. Different things like going to bed earlier or later, may not work and increase frustration. Negative expectations and experiences displace those needed for easy, relaxing sleep.

Common Sleeping Difficulties

- Cannot fall asleep despite feeling tired ("Insomnia")
- Frequently waking throughout the night
- Waking during the night or too early in the morning, and unable to fall asleep again
- Poor sleep quality, feeling tired after waking



Sleep Difficulties During Cancer

Cancer disrupts sleep during and after treatment:

- Chemo and other drugs can upset sleep patterns, like persistent jetlag
- Pain, discomfort or other symptoms prevent getting comfortable in bed. Pain, or discomfort should be discussed with your doctor, or **HKU Jockey Club Institute of Cancer Care** on 3917 9606
- Worry and anxiety can keep you awake
- Depression disrupts sleep patterns

Other factors affecting sleep quality include:

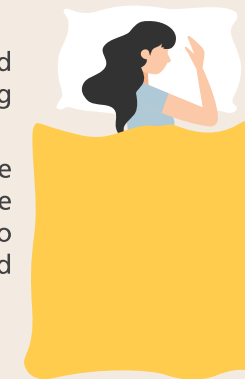
- Inactivity - sleep is patchy and less refreshing
- Poor sleep environment-temperature, light or noise
- Using digital devices with LED screens immediately before sleep can delay sleep onset
- Using bedroom for other activities, like work, playing video games
- Other medical conditions, being overweight and allergies can affect breathing, making sleep difficult
- Alcohol and caffeine use in the evenings, large late meals
- Disturbance by others, neighbours, pets



Improving Sleep Following Cancer and Its Treatment

These steps can improve sleep after cancer treatment:

- Stick to a Schedule
 1. Go to bed 7 hours *before* you want to wake up, or 17 hours *after* you wake up. Same time every night. Irrespective of how many hours sleep you had or how tired you feel get up 7 hours after you go to bed
 2. Avoid lie ins or naps longer than 20 minutes in total during the day
- Improve Sleep Hygiene
 1. Use the bedroom for sleep and sex only
 2. Develop a pre-bed routine: For the hour before you go to bed:
 - a. Don't use digital devices (TV is ok)
 - b. Have a small, warm, carbohydrate drink
 - c. Personal hygiene, then take a warm shower
 - d. Ensure the bedroom is cool, 16-23°C is best
 - e. Block external light and ensure quiet and darkness. Get into bed and immediately switch off the light
 - f. Find a comfortable position and lay still for 10 minutes. Use the same position nightly
 - g. Relax all of your muscles and think about something peaceful and nice
 - h. If worrying or intrusive thoughts occur, just observe them, but do not react to them. Remain relaxed and calm. You should soon sleep



3. Try Relaxation Technique:

If not sleep after 20 minutes, or awake in the night for longer than 20 minutes

- a. Get out of bed and immediately leave the bedroom
- b. Sit quietly or read some relaxing material, no digital devices or exciting TV
- c. Keep a relaxed and calm mind
- d. Quieten yourself, systematically relax your body
- e. After 10 minutes of being relaxed, return to bed take your starting position, keep still and relaxed. Repeat as needed. Get up at your original time

4. Brisk physical activity for at least 15 minutes each day. This helps sleep onset

5. Reading helps to tire the eyes and feel sleepy

Allow 1-2 weeks' time to regain good sleeping habits, be patient and follow these guidelines, particularly the time to bed and time awake.

See your doctor if:

- You think you might have a sleep cycle problem (jet lag) or if your medication may be keeping you awake
- You have breathing or snoring issues, causing frequent awakening
- You have persistent pain or other symptoms keeping you awake

Call **HKU Jockey Club Institute of Cancer Care** on **3917 9606** if you experience

- Panic or anxiety problems linked to cancer or cancer recurrence
- Low mood or loss of interest in normal activities, for at least two weeks
- Sleeping difficulties persist after your doctor excludes medical reasons

<http://jcicc.med.hku.hk/>

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