

Sleep Problems

People with cancer often report problems with getting the right amount of sleep. Some people find that they are sleeping much more than usual. Other people share that they suffer from insomnia which is the inability to get enough sleep to feel rested. Excessive sleep, too little sleep, restlessness and increased dream activity or nightmares can significantly affect your ability to feel well and to cope with daily activities.

For some people going through cancer treatment, disruption in sleep can be one of the most distressing side effects they face. Feeling too tired or fatigued from cancer treatment and having sleep problems sometimes go hand in hand. Please talk with your doctor if you are upset or feeling affected by changes in your sleep patterns. There are treatments and support services that can help with sleep problems.

Tips for Managing Too Much Sleep (sleeping more than 10 hours each day):

- Try to get some exercise every day especially during the morning or early afternoon.
- Develop a routine to sleep and wake at the same time every day. When it is time to get up, get out of bed and try to engage in activities that you enjoy and that call for your full attention.
- Avoid foods or activities that make you sleepy during the day.
- If you feel that sadness or depression may be contributing to your sleeping too much, talk to your doctor about your symptoms to work on a plan for relief.

Tips for Managing Too Little Sleep:

- Work with your doctor to address underlying sources of insomnia, such as pain, anxiety, or stimulating medication.
- Try to sleep and wake at the same time each day.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and tobacco, especially at night.
- If you are hungry at bedtime, eat a light snack.
- If you are able, exercise regularly or at the very least, move about during the day.
- Sleep in a quiet, dark room that is not too hot or cold.
- Start a bedtime ritual, such as reading or taking a bath, to signal it is time for sleep.
- Medications are sometimes used to treat insomnia in the short-term.

Tips for Dealing with Disruptive Dreams or Nightmares

- If you are troubled by disturbing dreams or nightmares, talk about a trusted family member, friend, or professional counselor or clergyman about your concerns. Talk therapy can be very helpful in reducing stress and anxiety from sleep disturbances.
- Write in a diary or draw pictures to express the content or themes of the dreams or nightmares.
- Imagine alternative endings or storylines to the nightmares.

Above all, remember that you do not need to be alone with sleep problems. While some sleep disruption is normal in stressful times, excessive sleep problems that continue over time need to be addressed with your health care team.