

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Cancer treatment can negatively affect your quality of sleep. But you can take effective steps to ensure you get the critical rest you need.

June 10, 2024 By [Kate Ferguson](#)

Many people living with cancer experience difficulty sleeping. Side effects from medications and other therapies can hinder quality shut-eye, as can anxiety, depression, worry, fear, stress and pain or physical discomfort, leading to fatigue, insomnia and an overall poorer quality of life. In addition, your environment and habits can ratchet up the risk for sleep problems.

Such issues may occur temporarily or persist for several months or years following cancer treatment. Over-the-counter and prescription medications may help; however, there's plenty you can do naturally to overcome these challenges and catch more zzz's.

Step Into the Light

Sunshine helps to reset our circadian rhythm—the body's natural sleep-wake cycle. What's more, controlling when you get sunlight helps regulate that cycle; exposure later in the day translates to a later bedtime for your body. Sunlight also prompts the brain to secrete serotonin, a feel-good hormone that helps lift our mood.

Create a Sound Sleep Routine

Turn in for bed at the same time each night, and get up at the same time every morning. Aim to make your bedroom dark and quiet with a comfortable temperature. Before lying down, do something that relaxes you, but limit your time on screens. Electronic screens emit blue light, which disrupts sleep and blocks the body's production of the hormone melatonin, which helps regulate sleep.

Doriot Kim

Stay Active

Moving more and sitting less can be a good way to help you get the slumber you need. If your doctor says it's safe for you to exercise, try some simple aerobic exercise to boost your heart rate and increase energy. For example, walk, dance, jog or swim according to your fitness level. If you must nap during the day, limit your snooze time to less than an hour.

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Mind What You Eat and Drink

Avoid eating large meals and drinking caffeine or alcohol before bedtime, which can ruin your sleep. Also, try a glass of warm milk—unless you're lactose intolerant, allergic to dairy or suffer from irritable bowel syndrome. Turns out this home remedy is supported by scientific evidence: The amino acid tryptophan found in milk can induce sleep, mainly by helping the body synthesize serotonin and melatonin.

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Talk With Your Doctor

Share your experiences with your health care team. Keep track of the medicines you take, when you go to bed, how long it takes to fall asleep and your naps and activities during the day; plus, list what you eat and drink. This detailed information can help doctors evaluate your sleep problems and develop an effective strategy to improve them.

