

Empower - Menopause and Cancer Survivorship Pathway

Sleep Disturbance

Sleep Hygiene Education

Sleep disturbance is a common challenge faced by cancer survivors.

WHAT IS SLEEP HYGIENE?

Sleep hygiene concerns your sleep habits, which play a critical role in your overall health.

Good sleep hygiene means practicing daily routines that support your body's natural ability to get to sleep, to reach a deep sleep and to stay asleep throughout the night.

Many people who experience insomnia have poor sleep hygiene which can exacerbate or perpetuate insomnia.

Looking at your activity around bedtime and improving on sleep hygiene may be effective in reducing sleep disturbance.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY SLEEP HYGIENE?

The following suggestions are examples of good sleep hygiene and should help achieve a more restful night of sleep.

LIFESTYLE AND DAYTIME FACTORS

EXERCISE

Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise most days. Do not exercise in the 2-3 hours before bed.

HAVE THE RIGHT SUNLIGHT EXPOSURE

Daylight is key to regulating daily sleep patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes each day. If possible, wake up with the sun or use very bright lights in the morning. Sleep experts recommend that, if you have problems falling asleep, you should get an hour of exposure to morning sunlight and turn down the lights before bedtime.

CAFFEINE, ALCOHOL & NICOTINE

The effects of caffeine can take as long as 8 hours to wear off fully. Coffee, fizzy drinks, certain teas and chocolate all contain the stimulant caffeine. A cup of coffee in the late afternoon can make it hard for you to get to sleep at night.

Avoid alcoholic drinks before bed. Having a nightcap before sleep may help you to relax, but heavy use of alcohol can really affect your REM sleep, keeping you in the lighter phases of sleep.

Nicotine is also a stimulant, often causing smokers to sleep only very lightly. Smokers often wake up very early in the morning because of nicotine withdrawal.

AVOID SLEEP DURING THE DAY

Don't take naps after 3pm. Naps can help make up for lost sleep, but late afternoon naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

AVOID GOING TO BED HUNGRY OR TOO FULL

Avoid large meals and beverages late at night. A light snack is okay, but a large meal can cause indigestion, which interferes with sleep.

Drinking too many fluids at night can cause frequent awakenings to urinate.

BEDROOM AND NIGHT-TIME FACTORS

STICK TO A SLEEP SCHEDULE

Go to bed at the same time every night and wake up and get up at the same time every morning. Even at the weekend – if you are serious about establishing better sleep! A consistent routine is like an anchor to your sleeping patterns.

A consistent routine improves not only the quantity of your sleep but the quality too, leading to a real difference in how your body will function and how you feel during the day.

Sleeping later at weekends won't fully make up for a lack of sleep during the week and will make it harder to wake up early on Monday morning.

DON'T LIE AWAKE IN BED

If you find yourself still awake after staying in bed for more than 20 minutes or if you are starting to feel anxious or worried, get up and do some relaxing activity until you feel sleepy. The anxiety of not being able to sleep can make it harder to fall asleep.

TRY TO HAVE A RELAXING BEDTIME ROUTINE

Relax before bed. Don't overschedule your day so you that no time is left for unwinding. A relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to music, should be part of your bedtime ritual.

KEEP THE BEDROOM QUIET, DARK AND A COMFORTABLE TEMPERATURE

BED IS FOR SLEEP AND SEX ONLY

Dark bedroom, cool bedroom, gadget-free bedroom. Get rid of anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep, such as noises, bright lights, an uncomfortable bed or warm temperatures. A TV, phone, or computer in your bedroom can be a distraction and deprive you of much needed sleep.

Having a comfortable mattress and pillow can help to promote a good nights sleep.

Those with insomnia often watch the clock. Turn the clock face out of view so you don't worry about the time whilst trying to fall asleep.

Resources:

The Good Sleep Guide (HSE)

[the-good-sleep-guidemmpfeb2018.pdf \(hse.ie\)](https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/mental_health/mental_health_topics/good_sleep/good_sleep_guidemmpfeb2018.pdf)