

## Fact Sheet

# Getting a good night's sleep when you're diagnosed with cancer

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Being told about a diagnosis of cancer can feel overwhelming.

Treatments like surgery, chemo or radiotherapy will make you more tired than usual. So it is frustrating if you are unable to get a proper night's sleep and, over time, this can make it harder to function to the best of your ability. Furthermore, lack of sleep may affect your attention, concentration and your moods.

Difficulty sleeping could be due to a variety of reasons. Have a talk with your treating team and GP about what can help in your specific circumstances. They will have ideas, and/or medicines that can help you. Here are some practical tips on how to get a good night's sleep.

- **Set up a bed-time routine**

This routine may be similar to when we were kids, or what we have for our kids. Get into your night clothes, wash/shower and brush your teeth. Some people like to read a book or listen to relaxing music for a while. Then try to go to bed when you feel sleepy. It is important for your body to recognise the routine as this helps you to fall asleep.

- **Limit alcohol, caffeine**

Avoid large meals, smoking, and working right before bedtime. Avoid caffeine after midday (noon), and avoid alcohol close to bedtime.

- **Try drinking something warm** before bedtime such as caffeine-free tea or warm milk.

- **Limit TV and screen time**

Watching tense or creepy dramas before bed will make it hard for you to wind down. Phone screens and laptops, computers or tablets increase cognitive (brain) stimulation.



Your brain's activity increases and your neurons (thoughts) race and divert you from calming down into a peaceful state of mind for sleep. Entertaining as WhatsApp and Facebook can be, they may trigger difficult emotions or thoughts if you are struggling with any. The light emitted from these screens may also trick your brain into thinking it is day which keeps you awake.

- **Make sure you are comfortable**

Keep your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool. Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex. Ensure you have comfy pillows and a firm mattress and, if applicable, take your pain medication as recommended. If you can't sleep after about 20 mins get up, this may seem counter intuitive (not what you would expect) but it helps to associate your bed with being asleep, not with being awake. Catch the next wave of sleep and then go back to bed.

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- **Use a relaxation or meditation CD, app or downloads**  
This helps to bring down your stress levels.  
Lavender or any relaxing aromas may help too.
- **Get up at the same time and try not to nap in the day**  
It is also best to go to sleep at about the same time each night.
- **Be physically active**  
Exercise helps improve sleep. Have a think about the kinds of exercise that would fit in with your physical restrictions such as Tai Chi, Yoga or walking.

**If your worries are keeping you awake, talk to our psychologist who may be able to help you.**

[You can find details here](#)

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**  
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