

Sleep Problems



Key Points

- Healthy sleep – you fall asleep in 15-20 minutes and wake up feeling rested.
- Keeping a sleep schedule (going to bed and getting up at the same time each day) may help.
- Turn off all screens (TVs, phones, tablets) at least 1 hour before you go to bed.
- Poor quality, or not enough, sleep affects your immune system, which raises your risk of infection. It can also affect your memory, concentration, mood, and relationships.

Despite battling fatigue, you may find yourself having sleep problems. Maybe you are having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Or perhaps you just don't feel rested when you wake up.

Sleep needs and patterns differ among people even under the best of circumstances. For example, a nap makes some people feel reenergized but makes others feel sluggish or cranky.

Signs You are Getting “Healthy” Sleep (National Sleep Foundation)

- You fall asleep within 15-20 minutes of lying down to sleep.
- You usually sleep a total of 7-9 hours in a 24-hour day.
- While in bed, your sleep is continuous—you don't have long periods of lying awake.
- You wake up feeling refreshed and alert and can be productive while awake. (It's OK if you have periods when you are less alert... as long as your alertness returns.)
- Your partner or family members don't notice any disturbing or unusual behavior from you while you sleep (snoring, pauses in breathing, restlessness, or other nighttime behaviors).



The Cost of Poor Sleep

- Extra stress on your immune system, which means a higher risk of infection
- Mood swings
- Problems with memory, concentration, and decision making
- Problems with daily activities and healthy relationships

Tips for Healthy Sleep

- ✓ Do not have any caffeine, chocolate, nicotine, and alcohol in the evening.
- ✓ Turn off the TV and computer at least 1 hour before going to bed.
- ✓ If you find it hard to turn your brain off, make a list of things you have to do the next day.
- ✓ Make a routine to help your body and mind relax and get ready for sleep. Try taking a bath, listening to music, or drinking a glass of milk.
- ✓ Keep a regular sleep schedule 7 days a week. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- ✓ Use the bedroom for sleep and intimacy only, not as extra living and work space.
- ✓ If you feel pressured by watching the clock, turn it around.
- ✓ If it's OK with your doctor, try some mild - moderate exercise during the day, such as taking a 20 minute walk most days. Exercise will help keep you up during the day, lessen stress, improve your mood, and may also help with sleep problems.
- ✓ If you don't fall asleep after 15 minutes go to another room. Avoid stimulating activities.

Tips to Manage Insomnia

- ✓ Try to identify the cause of your sleep problems. Pain? Depression? Worry? Too much caffeine?
- ✓ Share your thoughts with your health care provider about your sleep problems. One way is to keep a sleep diary. Chart the times you are asleep and awake. Write down what you think may be adding to your sleep problems.
- ✓ Do not eat or exercise within 2 hours of bedtime.
- ✓ Make the room dark. Turn clocks with illuminated faces away from you.
- ✓ Try not to nap during the day. If you must take a nap, only sleep for 1 hour or less.
- ✓ Try relaxing music or an activity that helps you feel less tense - singing, cooking, painting, reading, praying, etc.
- ✓ If you have a lot of caffeine, try to slowly lower the amount (and none in the evening).
- ✓ If you can't sleep because of pain, make sure you are taking your medication exactly as prescribed. If this is not helping your pain, talk with your health care provider.
- ✓ If your sleep problems are because you are worried or anxious about your cancer, talk with your health care provider or social worker, or join a support group or Roswell's online community.
community.roswellpark.org
- ✓ If you are feeling depressed and have lost interest in activities you used to enjoy, feel hopeless, or don't want to get out of bed/chair, tell your health care provider.
- ✓ Some people have found over-the-counter remedies helpful such as melatonin products. **Always check with your health care provider before taking any medications – even over the counter medications.** Some sleep aids contain ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and may not be right for you because they can hide a fever, an important warning sign of infection.
- ✓ Ask your doctor or nurse if you are taking your medications at the right times of the day. For example, it is best not to take steroids in the evening.