Article Series Managing Fatigue

Understand how sleep can affect your cancer journey

3 min read

☐ Like (1) Likes

Bookmark

Share

Print



All Managing Fatigue

Resize

A A A

Sleep is an essential building block of health. Sleep strengthens our immune system conserves energy, and provides a much-needed period of recovery for the body and brain.

Understanding the link between sleep and cancer can help empower you to take small steps that may have a meaningful impact on your cancer journey.

Here are some key insights about sleep and cancer, along with Microsteps you can consider taking to help start improving your sleep.

Sleep disorders are common in people living with cancer.

If you're having trouble sleeping while living with cancer, you're not alone. As many as half of people living with cancer have sleep-related problems. Common reasons for sleep difficulties include:

- Physical changes caused by cancer or surgery
- Drug or treatment side effects
- Stress
- Hospital environments and routines
- Long-term use of certain drugs

Sleep is connected to other daily habits.

Factors like what you eat and drink and how much physical activity you get can affect your sleep. It's important to be thoughtful about how choices you make throughout the day might affect your sleep and the role your behaviors play in supporting your cancer journey.

Microsteps that may improve sleep

Microsteps are small, science-backed steps that may be taken to build new healthy habits.

Wherever you are on your cancer journey, you have an opportunity to help improve your sleep, starting tonight. Below you can find some Microsteps that may help. As always, consult with your care team for the management practices that are best for you.

Trying a short meditation before bed.

Paying attention to your breath may help reduce stress and result in better sleep.

Relaxing your muscles when you get into bed.

Progressive muscle relaxation, or flexing and relaxing one group of muscles at a time, has been shown to improve sleep quality for some cancer patients.

Creating a wind-down routine to ease yourself into sleep.

This can include taking a hot bath or shower, sipping herbal tea, or doing a short meditation.

Setting a daily caffeine cut-off to improve your sleep.

Caffeine can make it harder to fall asleep if consumed too late in the day. Setting a caffeine cut-off at least six hours before bed can help.

Trying box breathing before bed.

Box breathing is a simple breathing technique that can activate the body’s parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for rest. Box breathing requires that a person inhale for a count of four, hold the air in for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, and repeat.

Speaking up about sleep disturbances.

If you’re hospitalized, your treatment may involve frequent night-time check-ins from nurses that can disturb your sleep. Ask your care team if there’s any way to minimize the interruptions.

Choosing a time each night to put your phone in Do Not Disturb mode.

Intentionally blocking notifications and calls can help put the day's demands behind you. This may help you reduce stress and distractions before bed and set you up for uninterrupted sleep.

Picking a consistent bedtime and sticking to it.

Consistency helps regulate the body’s internal clock, so setting a goal to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day can help.

Avoiding spicy foods before bed.

Spicy foods may irritate the stomach, which can make it harder to fall asleep.

Developed with Thrive Global