Article Series Managing Fatigue All

The science behind sleep — and how to get more of it

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Sleep can be perceived as a time of rest and inactivity. But in fact, it’s a time of intense activity for the brain. Getting the sleep we need has benefits for our memory, decision-making, emotional regulation, and ability to empathize with others. And when we make sleep a priority, we make other important habits and decisions easier.

What happens when we don’t get the sleep we need? Our immune system weakens, making it harder for us to fight disease. Our work performance and productivity may suffer. Lack of sleep has even shown similar effects to being intoxicated.

If you’re having trouble getting the sleep you need, you’re not alone. Sleep disturbances are common among people living with cancer. The good news is that you can improve your sleep with **Microsteps** –– small, science-backed steps that can be taken to build new healthy habits. As always, consult with your care team for the management practices that are best for you.

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

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

Setting a wind-down alarm for 30 minutes before your bedtime.

When you think of sleep as an actual appointment, you're much more likely to give it the time it deserves. Setting an alarm reminds you that if you're going to get to bed on time, you may want to start wrapping things up.

Turning off or putting away electronic devices 30 minutes before you go to bed.

Research on the impact of blue light on sleep has been mixed, but some studies suggest that blue light can reduce sleep quality. Instead, try winding down with an activity like reading, sipping a cup of herbal tea, or a warm bath.

Keeping your bedroom cool.

A cool bedroom environment is key to getting a good night’s sleep. Experts recommend 60° to 67° F. Check with your care team to get guidance on the best temperature for you.

Taking a hot bath or shower before you go to sleep.

Taking a bath or shower an hour or so before bed can lower your body temperature, making it easier to fall asleep. Check with your care team to make sure this is safe and feasible for you.

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