

Consistent sleep has benefits. Here's how to create your routine.

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Quality sleep is important for everyone, but getting enough sleep as well as consistent sleep may be a challenge for those living with cancer.

“We often focus on sleep duration [how long we sleep] but that’s not necessarily the one that counts the most,” says Amanda Phipps, an epidemiologist at Fred

Hutchinson Cancer Center. “It’s just what we’ve studied the most. Consistency of sleep is also important.”

To understand why, consider your circadian rhythm. You can think of this as your body’s internal clock. Circadian rhythms are an emerging area of focus for cancer researchers.

Over the course of 24 hours, your circadian rhythm regulates many of your body’s vital processes, including your metabolism (the process your body uses to turn food into energy), hormone release, and, most notably, your sleep-wake cycle.

Maintaining a regular sleep schedule can help keep this clock running smoothly, promoting better sleep quality and overall health.

When your clock isn’t running smoothly, these circadian disruptions can weaken your immune system and potentially make it harder for your body to fight cancer.

If you struggle to keep a consistent sleep schedule, you’re not alone. An abnormal sleep-wake cycle is one of the most common sleep disorders for people living with cancer. There are many potential reasons for this, including physical changes caused by cancer or surgery, side effects of medications and even the stress and worry about what you’re going through.

If you’re experiencing cancer-related fatigue, it may be useful to speak to your care team. Learn more small behavior changes to take in your daily life in [Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue](#).

Not everyone can achieve perfect sleep each and every night. But you may be able to function better by taking small steps to create a more consistent sleep schedule.

Here are some **Microsteps** to consider as you build a sleep routine that works for you. As always, consult with your care team for the guidance and recommendations that are best for you.

Setting a consistent bedtime reminder, even on weekends.

Research shows that this consistency may be beneficial for people living with cancer. Try making sure you're in bed by the same time each night and out of bed by the same time each morning.

Setting a gentle alarm for 30 minutes before bedtime to remind yourself to start winding down.

You might be used to setting an alarm to wake up, but you can also signal to yourself that it's nearly time to get to bed with a gentle alarm. If you struggle with “revenge bedtime procrastination” — which is staying up late to make up for lost free time during the day — this may be especially helpful.

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. Try a caffeine cut-off about six hours before bed.

If you get home later than usual, trying a mini version of your bedtime routine.

For example, you might read in bed for five minutes instead of 30. This can help you make sure that you still go to bed at a similar time and continue your consistency.

Starting your morning by stepping outside.

Exposing yourself to natural light in the morning can help regulate your circadian rhythm, sending a signal to your body to wake up.

Planning fun activities during the day instead of at night.

Centering your weekend around daytime activities, like visiting a farmer's market, going for a bike ride, or trying out a new restaurant at lunch, can help keep your body in tune with natural light patterns. This may make it easier to fall asleep and wake up around the same time as you do during the weekdays.

Keeping any naps short and early in the day.

Napping late in the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night. If you need a nap earlier in the day, keep it short — under 30 minutes — to reduce the likelihood of it affecting your nighttime sleep.

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