

Insomnia: How to get a good night's sleep

Insomnia is a common side effect of cancer that affects nearly half of all cancer patients. While lack of sleep or poor quality of sleep are strongly associated with fatigue and a reduced quality of life, Rheinheimer says most cancer survivors rarely address the issue with their doctor.

Those who suffer from insomnia may experience difficulty getting to sleep, frequent awakenings, or early morning awakenings. Cancer survivors are more likely to experience insomnia due to physical illness, pain, hospitalization, drugs and the psychological impact of having cancer.

There are many different types of insomnia:

Acute or situational insomnia: occurs during traumatic events or impending deadlines and typically lasts less than four weeks. It is likely to disappear when the cause is eliminated.

Chronic insomnia: defined as inadequate quantity or quality of life that lasts for at least a month. It often starts out as situational insomnia upon receiving the diagnosis of cancer and then progresses to a chronic state.

Marcia Prenguber, doctor of naturopathic medicine says “developing and maintaining good sleep hygiene is often the best way to treat insomnia.”

Try the following to get a good nights' sleep:

Eliminate caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

Eat regularly scheduled meals and avoid heavy, late-night snacks.

Limit evening fluids to a glass of warm milk or chamomile tea before bedtime.

Exercise regularly during early morning or late afternoon.

Take a hot bath before bedtime.

Try essential oils and botanical and hormonal supplements.

Use guided imagery to create safe and calm feelings.

Use progressive relaxation to help release muscular tension.

Meditate to clear the mind of excessive worry.

Take deep breaths, sigh and yawn to prompt relaxation.

Sleep in a dark, cool room.

Maintain regular sleep and wake times, even on weekends.

Limit time spent in bed to approximately eight hours.

Use the bedroom for sleep only. Do not read, watch television or eat in bed.

Avoid daytime naps. If necessary, nap in early afternoon for no longer than 30 minutes.

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