



INSOMNIA AND SLEEP PROBLEMS

Problems sleeping are a common occurrence after breast cancer diagnosis. In some cases you may feel exhausted but not adequately able to rest at night. Sometimes not feeling well keeps you up at night, and sometimes you may feel like you just can't shut off your mind. But know that most people will experience some level of insomnia or sleep disturbance at some time in their life.

- Experiencing this can increase your stress level and affect every part of your life. Here are some tips that may help you cope with sleep disturbances.
- Try to maintain a regular sleep and wake schedule. This can be difficult to do when you're working and/or have kids, but sticking to a routine is helpful for everyone. If you nap, try to do it around the same time every day.
- Take a brief walk outside when the sun is coming up and going down. This can help your body to create its own sleep schedules by influencing melatonin production.
- Exercise can help you boost energy and sleep better. Even people who exercise at night can sleep better.
- Make sure you're getting enough Calcium and Magnesium. These two minerals really help the body to relax. Talk to your doctor about adding a supplement if you feel you may need more. If you notice that your heart pounds at night when you lay down, these might help.
- Therapeutic massage can help you sleep better, and has the added benefit of making you feel nice and relaxed as well.
- Try relaxation techniques before going to bed, or just after lying down. Some people do breathing exercises, listen to guided meditation recordings (you can find these on YouTube), and some people count backwards from 300 by 3's. These can distract the mind, and help lull you into sleep.
- Use a white noise machine to block sounds, an eye mask if it's too bright. Try to keep your room dark and quiet when it's time for bed.
- Reading can help you feel sleepy as well.





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- If you're still awake 30 minutes after going to sleep, get up and sit in a chair in a dark room. Some people also find it helpful to read something until they feel sleepy again (but be sure to read something boring, and not something too exciting). Staying in bed and becoming frustrated can lead to you associating your bed with stress and anxiety, and make matters worse.
- There are many over the counter medications that are available to help with sleep. Using these with caution and after talking to your doctor, may help for the short term. Some herbal preparations or over the counter melatonin can be helpful, but know that these are not regulated. Be sure to ask if they're safe for you to use. Many times medications that are sold as "sleep aid" are just the main ingredient in Benadryl®.
- In some cases prescriptions are useful for the short term treatment of insomnia or sleep problems. There are many out there that can be helpful. If you're not sleeping due to anxiety, your doctor may prescribe a medication that can help with your anxious thoughts. Other times, prescription sleep aids can be used. Be sure to ask your doctor what's right for you.
- If pain is making it difficult to sleep, try taking medications for pain (either prescription or over the counter) about 15 minutes before going to bed. Make sure your bed is comfortable and your covers will keep you warm but not too hot. Sometimes after treatment for breast cancer, women find it more comfortable to sleep while holding a pillow against their chest while lying on their side or propping up the arm on the affected side while lying on your back. These techniques can reduce pulling on the breast and increased swelling associated with lymphedema.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been shown to help tremendously with women who have had breast cancer deal with insomnia. Ask your doctor if you need a referral for a practitioner.

Useful Websites:

- http://www.breastcancer.org/treatment/side_effects/insomnia





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- <http://www.bosombuddypillow.org/design>
- <http://www.breastcancerpartner.com/insomnia.shtml>
- <https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/>

