

## DANA-FARBER/BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S CANCER CENTER

## Sleep problems (Insomnia)

**What is insomnia?**

Having problems with falling asleep or staying asleep through the night can be very frustrating. If you have trouble with sleep at least 3 nights a week and have had these problems for over 1 month, you may have insomnia. Insomnia is a medical condition that can have serious effects on your health if it is untreated. It is very common for cancer patients and survivors to have insomnia.

**What are some things I can do right now to improve my sleep?**

Consider these strategies to improve your sleep.

- *Follow a regular schedule.* Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, even on weekends. Try eating meals at the same time. Limit daytime napping.
- *Watch what you eat and drink.* Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, nicotine, spicy foods, and alcohol at night. These can all interfere with sleep.
- *Get some physical activity* during the day. Working out too close to bedtime can make it hard to get to sleep.
- *Create the right atmosphere.* Make sure that your bedroom is free from as much light and noise as possible. Relax before sleep by reading a book, listening to music, or taking a bath. Turn off the television, computer, and cell phone.
- Use your bed only for sleep! If you can't fall asleep, get out of bed. Do not try to fall asleep – it will either happen or it won't.
- *Keep a journal* or notebook near your bed to write down your worries or to-do items that might keep you awake.

**How can I get help for my insomnia?**

First, make sure that your oncologist is aware of any difficulty that you may be having with your sleep. It is important to ensure that any medical and psychiatric conditions that may impact your sleep are well managed by your medical team. For insomnia lasting more than 1 month, Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment (CBT) for Insomnia should be considered. It is very effective and provides long-term management of your insomnia symptoms. For brief periods of insomnia (less than 1 month), medications designed to address insomnia might be helpful. Please note that there are potential medication interactions and side effects that you should discuss thoroughly with your medical team.

For More information about insomnia and cancer check out this Dana-Farber blog post [here](#).