

If You Have Difficulty Sleeping



This Information Sheet offers suggestions that may help if you have difficulty sleeping.

Some helpful hints

- Relax in the evening by doing something you enjoy, for example, reading or listening to music. Try to wind down before you go to bed.
- Have a regular routine for preparing for bed and regular time for bed.
- Exercise during the day can help you sleep well.
- If possible do not use your bedroom as an office or study. The bedroom should be reserved for sleeping and sexual activity, so that you associate it with pleasurable feelings.
- Try not to do work-related activities or use the computer too close to bedtime.
- Ensure that your sleeping environment is as comfortable as possible, for example, a pleasant room temperature, darkness, low or no noise.
- Some people find lavender relaxing. Try a lavender pillow or oil in the bath.
- Naps during the day may be necessary if you are ill or have little energy but may contribute to your difficulty in sleeping at night.
- Caffeinated coffee, tea, soft drinks and alcohol are stimulants. Drinking these before bedtime may keep you awake, but a warm bath and milky drink may be helpful.

To avoid having to get up to go to the bathroom during the night, avoid drinking just before bedtime. Go to the toilet before you go to bed.

Sometimes sedatives (sleeping pills) are helpful in the very short term. You may like to discuss this option with your doctor.

Getting to sleep or back to sleep

- If sleep does not come easily tell yourself it doesn't matter, resting and relaxing are beneficial.
- If you have been awake for a while, get up and read or do something relaxing such as listening to music for a little while and return to bed when you feel sleepy.
- If you have things on your mind, write them down and tell yourself you'll deal with them in the morning.
- Try to resist the temptation of looking at the time and becoming frustrated with how long you have been awake for or how much sleep you are missing.
- If you can't sleep because of hot flushes, pain or nausea, talk to your doctor or nurse about ways to manage these.

Relaxing exercises

When you go to bed try saying these simple statements to yourself.

- I gently close my eyes and sigh out the cares of the day.
- I allow a gentle calming breath to come in and feel my abdomen gently rise.
- I breathe out slowly and completely. As I breathe out I empty my mind of thoughts and distractions.
- I am aware of them leaving my mind – I let them go.
- I let my thoughts flow out like a gentle river.
- My mind empties and the gentle waters calm me.

- I let go of my day and float peacefully and in contentment.
- I am at ease.

Some people find repeating one word helpful. Listening to a voice guided relaxation and visualisation tape or CD may also be helpful.

Stopping negative thoughts

If you find yourself going over and over the same worries, mentally say 'stop!' to yourself and refocus on your breathing.

Breathe slowly and smoothly, counting each inhale and exhale – 'inhale one, exhale two, inhale three, exhale four, etc'. As you do this, feel the sensations of breathing in your nostrils, your windpipe, your chest and your abdomen and feel the warmth spreading through your body to your fingers and toes.

Bad dreams

Bad dreams may cause anxiety and some ways to relieve this may be to turn on the light or put your feet on the floor. Tell yourself it was just a dream and that you're alright. As you prepare to go to sleep again it may help to occupy your mind with pleasant pictures – visualise a place in which you feel comfortable. Ask your local Cancer Society for any useful reading or CDs on difficulties with sleeping.