

Patient information

Sleep

Clinical Psychology -Liverpool Cancer Psychology Service

If you are living with, or have experienced cancer, restful sleep is an important aspect of wellbeing. How much restful sleep you get is important for recovery and day-to-day life. This leaflet is here to help aid understanding of sleep health and offer practical tips and resources to improve your rest and wellbeing.



What is Sleep Health?

Sleep health, also known as sleep hygiene, means building healthy habits and creating a restful environment to help you sleep better. Considering your daily routines and surroundings is important as it can impact on how well you rest, especially during cancer treatment and recovery.



Why is Sleep Health Important?

Sleep health is an important part of your overall wellbeing. Good sleep habits can help reduce stress, improve the quality of sleep, and support your mood, memory, and concentration. It can also help support your immune system and your body recovery.



What might be disrupting your sleep?

During treatment and when in recovery, it is completely normal to have sleep disruptions. This can include pain or physical discomfort, anxiety or worry, side effects from treatment such as nausea or night sweats, as well as changes to your usual routine or time spent in hospital. These can affect how well you sleep.



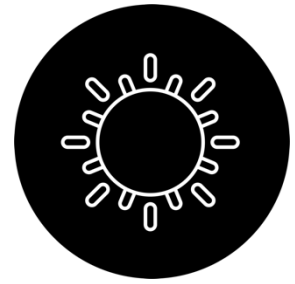
How Can I Improve my Sleep?

There is a lot you can do to improve your sleep by adjusting how you think about sleep, your habits, and your bedtime routines. See our recommended top tips to help you get more restful and restorative sleep.

Top tips

Exposure to Sunlight:

Light plays a key role in regulating the body's 'internal clock.' Morning exposure to natural sunlight helps reset your circadian rhythm, reinforcing wakefulness during the day and sleepiness at night. Our bodies rely on light cues - darkness signals bedtime, while light promotes alertness. If it's still bright outside when you're trying to sleep, using blackout curtains can help create a sleep-friendly environment.



Movement:

Movement and light physical activity can support healthy sleep when timed appropriately. Movement throughout the day promotes sleepiness later in the day, but vigorous activity too close to bedtime may elevate body temperature and delay the natural cooling process essential for sleep. To avoid disrupting your sleep window, limit strenuous exercise to at least two hours before bed.

Gentle stretching is generally fine, provided it doesn't increase alertness.



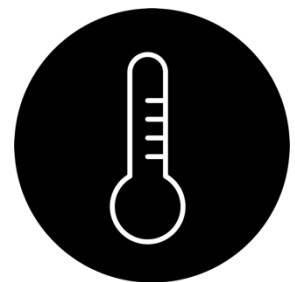
Routine and Sleep Regularity:

Maintaining a consistent sleep and wake schedule can help support a stable sleep rhythm. Going to bed and waking at the same times each day helps train your body to feel naturally sleepy at the right times. If you wake during the night and struggle to fall back asleep, try getting out of bed safely [or sitting up in bed] and doing something calming until feeling sleepy.



Environment and Sleep Aids:

Room temperature kept relatively cool helps, it has been reported individuals sleep better and quicker when there is a slight drop in body temperature. Reducing exposure to noise has also been proven to be helpful, this can be done by turning notifications off on your phone, reducing noises from machines, and wearing ear plugs.



Nutrition:

Certain foods and when you eat can play a significant role in sleep quality. It is advised to eat your last meal a couple of hours before bedtime to aid digestion. Maintaining a balanced diet, and moderating caffeine and alcohol intake can contribute to better sleep health.



Reduce Caffeine Intake:

If you are struggling to fall asleep, reducing your caffeine intake may help. Try to avoid caffeine for at least 6 hours before bedtime. Remember—caffeine isn't just in coffee, it can be found in tea, fizzy drinks, energy drinks and even some medications.



Importance of Medication:

Taking medication as prescribed supports your health and sleep. Always check with your healthcare team or GP before considering taking/discontinuing any new medication.



Bed:

Make sure your mattress provides good support and that your pillow suits your needs. Comfort is especially important during recovery. Trying different sleeping positions can help improve your rest - consider using body pillows or wedge pillows for extra support.



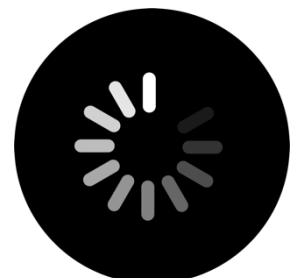
Napping:

Short naps may be refreshing, but too long or late naps might interfere with your nighttime sleep or use up your deep sleep too early. Try to keep naps to 30 minutes or less and avoid napping too close to bedtime. Nap in your bed when possible, this helps your brain associate the bed with sleep and rest.



Pacing and Mindfulness:

It is important to pace yourself especially on days where you feel tired. Try to stop yourself before you become completely worn out, rather than pushing through fatigue. Taking regular breaks and including restful activities such as mindfulness [a state of being in the present moment] or gentle breathing exercises can help prevent burnout and manage energy levels.



Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

For further information, or to explore additional helpful resources, please visit:

Websites

- **The Sleep Charity Information & Support - The Sleep Charity**
- **Macmillan Cancer Support—fatigue Coping with fatigue (tiredness) | Macmillan Cancer Support**
- **Cancer Research UK Difficulty sleeping | Coping with cancer | Cancer Re-search UK**
- **Age UK <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/mind-body/getting-a-good-nights-sleep/>**
- **NHS Inform Sleep problems and insomnia self-help guide | NHS inform**
- **NICE Sleep and sleep conditions | Topic | NICE**
- **Sleep Clinic Aintree Sleep Medicine - Aintree University Hospital - NHS**
- **Live Well With Pain Sleep - Live Well with Pain**
- **‘Managing and Treating Breathlessness’ Managing and treating breathlessness | Macmillan Cancer Support**
- **Clinical Health Psychology YouTube page clinical health psychology - YouTube**
- **Menopause and Sleep Menopause and sleep - Sleepstation**
- **Movement Medicine Cancer_Patient_info_leaflet_2020**

Apps

- **BalanceBalance - Balance app**
- **Velindre Mindfulness Velindre Mindfulness App on the App Store**
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia Onboarding Sleep Test - Sleepio**

It is important to be aware whether any issues are because of usual sleep behaviours or other factors. If you are struggling with your sleep and the problem continues to persist, contact your GP for extra help and support.

Sleep Groups

Our cancer service offers sleep groups developed to help you improve your sleep following cancer treatment. These groups run in a series of three weekly sessions, available in-person or online. It is advised that you are not accessing psychological therapy when attending the group.

If you are a Liverpool University Hospital Foundation Trust patient and would like more information please discuss a referral with your Cancer Nurse Specialist.

Telephone: 0151 529 3251

Text phone number: 18001 0151 529 3251

**Author: Clinical Psychology - Liverpool Cancer Psychology Service
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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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