

# Sleep problems

Many people affected by cancer can have difficulty sleeping. This is called insomnia. Long periods of not sleeping well can lead to other problems. There are some things you can do to try and improve your sleep.

If worry and anxiety are keeping you awake, talking to someone may help. Writing down your worries a few hours before you go to bed can help clear your mind. Breathing and relaxation exercises may also be useful to reduce anxiety and stress.

Some medicines used in the treatment of cancer can affect your sleep. Your doctor or nurse can give you advice on coping with this.

You may be able to take sleeping tablets to help. These can have side effects, so they are usually prescribed for only 1 to 2 weeks. There are also some behavioural therapies that can help. Your GP can tell you if these are suitable for you.

## Tips for managing sleep problems

- Sleep for the right amount of time. Try to sleep for just long enough to feel refreshed the next day.
- Try to increase your physical activity. Even light exercise will help, such as regular short walks.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Make your bedroom a relaxing place. Create an area that is dark, quiet and comfortable. The room temperature should be comfortably warm. If your bedroom is noisy, using ear plugs may help.
- Try having a light snack, warm milk or a hot drink before going to bed. But avoid large meals, a lot of fluids and food and drinks that contain stimulants, such as caffeine or lots of sugar.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink before bed.
- Try mental exercises. These could help you sleep as they focus your brain away from worries.
- Simple breathing and relaxation exercises may be very useful in reducing anxiety and stress.
- Get out of bed if you are unable to sleep – some people find listening to a familiar story or watching a non-stimulating TV programme may lull them to sleep.
- If you wake at night and are worrying about things, write them down.
- Some medicines such as steroids can upset sleeping. If you are taking steroids, ask your doctor if you can take them earlier in the day.

**Local resources:**

Resource	Contact details

**National resources:**

Resource	Contact details
The British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA)	<b>www.bcma.co.uk</b> <b>Email</b> office@bcma.co.uk <b>Tel</b> 0845 345 5877
British Holistic Medical Association	<b>www.bhma.org</b>
British Reflexology Association	<b>www.britreflex.co.uk</b> <b>Email</b> bra@britreflex.co.uk <b>Tel</b> 01886 821 2017

**Further information**

[www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/other-side-effects/difficulty-sleeping.html](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/other-side-effects/difficulty-sleeping.html)

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk)

- **MAC11671 Managing the symptoms of cancer**
- **MAC11645 Cancer and complementary therapies**
- **MAC11593 How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer**

**More information and support**

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](http://macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call our support line.

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