

Sleeping problems

This information is about sleep problems. Many people with cancer have [problems with sleeping](#) at some point. Sleep problems can include difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep, or waking up still feeling tired. Most adults need around 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night, but you may be okay with less if you feel refreshed when you wake.

Different things can cause sleep problems, such as [worry and anxiety](#). But you might also have sleep problems because of cancer or cancer treatment. Some medicines, such as [steroids](#), can affect your sleep. Hormonal therapies for [breast cancer](#) and [prostate cancer](#) can cause [hot flushes and sweats](#). Talk to your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist about whether your medicines may be affecting your sleep. They may be able to give you advice.

Not getting enough sleep can affect your well-being and ability to cope. If sleep problems are making your life difficult, it can sometimes help to take a short course of sleeping tablets. If you think they may help, talk to your doctor. Generally, sleeping tablets are only prescribed for a few days or weeks. Behavioural therapies help to change the way you think, feel and behave when it comes to sleeping. There are types of behavioural therapy that can be used for improving sleep. Your cancer team can tell you more.

Tips for managing sleeping problems

- Have a regular bedtime routine. For example, have a caffeine-free hot drink, take a warm bath and read in bed for a while. Sleep for a set amount of time. Some people find their sleep is better when they go to bed and get up at a similar time every day. Go to bed when you feel sleepy and avoid going too early.
- [Physical activity](#) can help with sleep. Try regular, short walks or a little gentle gardening.
- Keep your bedroom quiet and dark. Curtains or blinds with blackout lining and ear plugs may help.
- Temperature can also affect sleep. If your room is too warm, your body does not feel as ready for sleep. Sleep can also be affected by being too cold. Try to keep your room a comfortable temperature.
- Eating or drinking just before bed, or being hungry, can disturb your sleep. You could try having a light snack, warm milk or a hot drink before going to bed. But avoid larger amounts of food or lots of fluid. Try to avoid food and drink that contains caffeine and sugar such as coffee, tea, cola or chocolate. Caffeine and sugar are stimulants which mean they can make you feel awake.
- Smoking is a stimulant and best avoided close to bedtime. Alcohol can sometimes feel like it is helping you get to sleep, but it causes interrupted sleep, so it is best to avoid it.
- It is good to associate your bedroom with sleep. It can help to go to another room if you feel wide awake in the night and then go back to bed when you feel sleepy. Some people find getting out of bed for 10 minutes helps. It is best to avoid screens such as phones and tablets. These devices can stimulate your brain. But if watching or listening to a relaxing programme does make you feel sleepy, you could try setting a timer so you don't stay up too long.
- Some people find that taking a nap in the day can help them sleep at night but this is not the case for everyone. If you do take naps, shorter naps earlier in the day are less likely to affect sleep at night.
- If you are worried and anxious, you may find talking to someone about your fears and worries will help. You could talk to your friend, partner, a family member, doctor, nurse, or a professional counsellor or psychologist.
- If you wake at night and are worried, write down what is worrying you. You can work through what is worrying you during the day, to help you sleep at night.
- Simple breathing and relaxation exercises may be very useful in reducing anxiety and stress. You can learn them at home using CDs, apps or podcasts, or you may prefer to join a group.
- Try practicing [mindfulness](#). Try paid apps such as [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#), or free apps such as [Healthy Minds Program](#).
- [Sleepio](#) offers a 6-week sleep improvement programme to help you sleep better if you have increased worries. You can sign up for free.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on orders.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [MAC11671 Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- [MAC11645 Cancer and complementary therapies](#)
- [MAC11593 How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [MAC12515 Physical activity and cancer](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Help to Overcome Problems Effectively (HOPE) is a course to help people after cancer treatment. It is a free 6-week self-management course that is run online. It was developed by Hope for the Community and Macmillan Cancer Support. To find out more, visit macmillan.org.uk/hope-programme

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

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

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#)
- [Anxiety UK](#)
- [The British Complementary Medicine Association \(BCMA\)](#)

Notes and questions
