

How to Manage Sleep Problems

What is insomnia?

Having problems with falling asleep or staying asleep through the night can be very frustrating. If you experience difficulty 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.

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 team at Dana-Farber.

For insomnia lasting more than 1 month that is not the direct result of ongoing medical or psychiatric issues, Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for Insomnia is the primary treatment. 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.

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

Consider these strategies to improve your sleep. However, note that sleep hygiene strategies are not a replacement for proper Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for insomnia.

- 🕒 Get up at the same time each day, 7 days a week!
- 🕒 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!
- 🕒 Make sure that your bedroom is free from as much light and noise as possible.
- 🕒 Avoid alcohol and caffeine consumption in the 6 hours prior to bedtime.
- 🕒 Maintain a regular schedule as much as possible, including eating meals at the same time.
- 🕒 Limit daytime napping.
- 🕒 Do not watch the clock!

Still have questions?

For more information or to discuss referrals for Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for insomnia, please speak with your medical provider or contact the Adult Survivorship Program by phone at **617-632-4LAD (Life After Diagnosis)** or email at dfci_adultsurvivors@dfci.harvard.edu.

This document is for informational purposes only. The content is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.