

Managing Sleeping Difficulties

Many people complain of difficulty sleeping related to breast cancer. This may be due to lifestyle habits, the trauma and stress of coping with a breast cancer diagnosis or the side effects of treatment. Estrogen and progesterone are hormones that play an important role in regulating the sleep cycle, so fluctuations in these as a natural part of the menstrual cycle, menopause, or through breast cancer treatments may lead to difficulty falling or staying asleep. Getting enough sleep is important for your immune system, mood, and weight, and it may also play a role in cancer prevention. Thus, it is important to make this a priority. As you will read below, optimizing sleep is very much about creating and maintaining a routine that is in line with your body's natural rhythm and is related to your eating and exercising schedules.

Tips for Optimizing Sleep Patterns:

- Do not overeat, especially after 6pm and eat meals at the same time every day.
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine intake, or stop caffeine intake early in the day. Caffeine can have a long lasting impact in our bodies, and can influence our ability to fall or stay asleep. Its effects may be subtle or seemingly unrelated to sleep difficulties. Chocolate contains caffeine and should be avoided in the evening.
- To avoid waking for urination, reduce your fluid intake after 5pm, focusing on meeting your needs earlier in the day.
- Get aerobic exercise early in the day, and limit vigorous exercise in the evening. Body temperature plays a role in sleep, with cool temperatures promoting sleep and heat promoting waking. As exercise raises the body's temperature, it may be difficult to fall asleep afterward.
- Attempt to get 15-30 minutes of morning sun exposure.
- Avoid napping, which may interfere with your sleep cycle.
- Dim lights and avoid "screens" in your area at least one hour before bed. Exposure to lights can reduce the production of melatonin, which is a hormone that promotes sleep.
- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day.
- Reduce noise and stimulating activity at least one hour before bed.
- Develop routine bedtime practices.
- Cool the temperature of your environment at least one hour before bed; 65 degrees is thought to be the optimal temperature for sleep.
- Consume herbal teas in the evening (chamomile, lemon balm, valerian, etc.).
- Do not lie in bed after night waking.
- Keys to an ideal sleep environment include: complete darkness, relaxing pillow, cool temperature, controlled noise, no computer or TV, and hidden or removed clocks.
- The bedroom should be for sleep or intimacy only. Do not read, work, or watch TV in bed.