



Problems
SLEEPING
during and after treatment

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

You or a loved one has been diagnosed with blood cancer. Cancer treatments can disrupt sleep. Find out how treatments can affect sleep and what strategies you can use to sleep better.

This fact sheet will help you:

- Learn about how cancer and cancer treatments affect sleep
- Find ways to manage sleep at home and in the hospital
- Recognize signs to follow up on with your healthcare team
- Think of questions to ask your healthcare team to improve the quality of your sleep

Let your healthcare team know if you have trouble sleeping. Together, you can come up with solutions to sleep better during your treatments.





Why do you have trouble sleeping?

People affected by blood cancer often have trouble sleeping during and after treatment.

Common causes are:

- Stress, anxiety or depression
- Physical discomfort (headaches, nausea, vomiting, pain)
- Changes in environment or routine, such as a hospital stay

Some treatments can also affect your sleep, such as:

- Steroids used in chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Antibiotics and antifungals
- Antidepressants and medications that treat anxiety (anxiolytics)

Sleep problems can make your other symptoms worse, such as pain, fatigue, trouble concentrating, and anxiety.

Understanding sleep disorders

Different types of sleep disorders have different causes, symptoms, and impacts on your health:



Insomnia

Often caused by stress, pain or side effects of treatments (such as steroids). You may have difficulty falling asleep, or you may wake up early or often. This can lead to chronic fatigue and trouble concentrating, which can make it harder for you to manage your treatment and daily activities.

Fragmented sleep

Often caused by physical symptoms (nausea, pain or hot flashes) or hospital stays. Frequent wakeups disturb your natural sleep cycles. They can lead you to feel sleepy in the daytime, which means you have less energy to cope with treatments.

Hypersomnia

Often related to the intense fatigue caused by cancer and treatments (such as chemotherapy). Hypersomnia results in an excessive need to sleep during the day, even after a full night's sleep. This can reduce your productivity, alertness, and ability to participate in family or social activities.

It is important to discuss these side effects with your healthcare team so they can adjust the treatments and optimize your sleep.



How to improve your sleep

The first step is to let your healthcare team know about the problems you are having with your sleep. They need to be aware of the side effects of your treatments so they can help you manage them.

There are many strategies that you can try on your own:

Improve your sleep habits

- Get up and go to bed at the same time every day, even on the weekend
- Limit daytime naps to 30 minutes and avoid sleeping in the late afternoon
- Use your bed for sleep and sex only
- Avoid eating heavy meals and spicy or sweet foods
- Don't smoke
- Limit your caffeine intake four to eight hours before bed
- Don't drink alcohol four to eight hours before bed

Manage your stress

- Exercise regularly (but stop three hours before bed)
- Unwind before going to bed by taking a hot bath, drinking chamomile tea, or doing breathing exercises
- Try relaxation techniques such as muscle relaxation, visualization, meditation, or hypnosis

Create a good environment for sleeping

- Remove all electronic devices from the bedroom
- Move clocks so you can't see them from the bed
- Limit screen time in the two hours before bedtime
- Make sure the room is dark and quiet (if needed, use earplugs, sound-absorbing curtains, white noise device, or a sleep mask)



What if you can't sleep?

If you can't fall asleep at bedtime or after waking up at night (for example, after going to the bathroom), try getting up and moving to another room. When you start to feel sleepy, go back to bed.

Over-the-counter supplements for sleep

Talk to your healthcare team before taking any supplements to try to improve your sleep during cancer treatment. Some supplements for insomnia can interfere with treatment and make it less effective.



Overnight stays at the hospital

Many factors can interfere with how much sleep you get and how well you sleep when you're in the hospital. Here are some tips to help you sleep there:

Maintain your sleep habits

- Try to keep your usual sleep schedule and habits that you have at home (for example, drink herbal tea before going to sleep)

Avoid spending the day lying in bed or sleeping

- Sit in a chair, take a walk in the hall, watch TV or read to help you stay alert
- Try not to nap in the late afternoon so you can stay alert during the day and fall asleep at night

Focus on relaxation

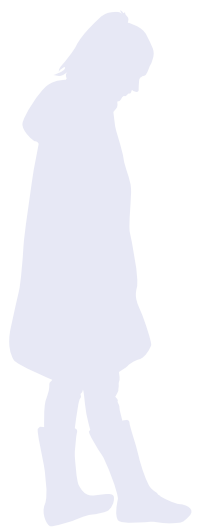
- Ask your family to bring reading material or a device that allows you to listen to soothing music, podcast or audio book

Manage your environment

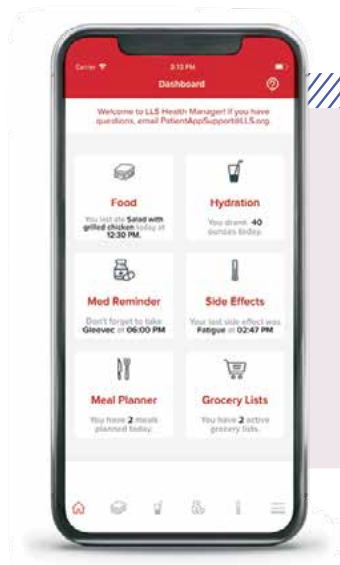
- Bring personal items for greater comfort, such as a pillow, blanket or socks
- Limit noise by asking the staff to close your door at certain times
- Protect yourself from light and sound distractions by wearing earplugs or an eye mask

Follow medication instructions

- If your doctor prescribes sleeping pills, take them about one hour before bedtime (ideally between 9 p.m. and midnight, depending on your routine)



Your healthcare team is there to support you throughout your treatment. Be sure to contact them if you have side effects so they can be managed quickly.



Track your side effects with the **LLS Health Manager App**

bloodcancers.ca/health-manager-app

Managing your side effects is an important part of cancer care. Tracking your medication, side effects, and food and nutrition intake allows you to share the information easily with your doctor to identify patterns and strategies.

Living with sleep disorders can be overwhelming. Seek medical help if you are feeling “down” or “blue” or do not want to do anything – and your mood does not improve over time. These could be signs of depression, an illness that should be treated even when you are undergoing treatment for blood cancer. Treatment for depression has important benefits for people living with cancer.



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1 833 222-4884 • info@bloodcancers.ca • bloodcancers.ca