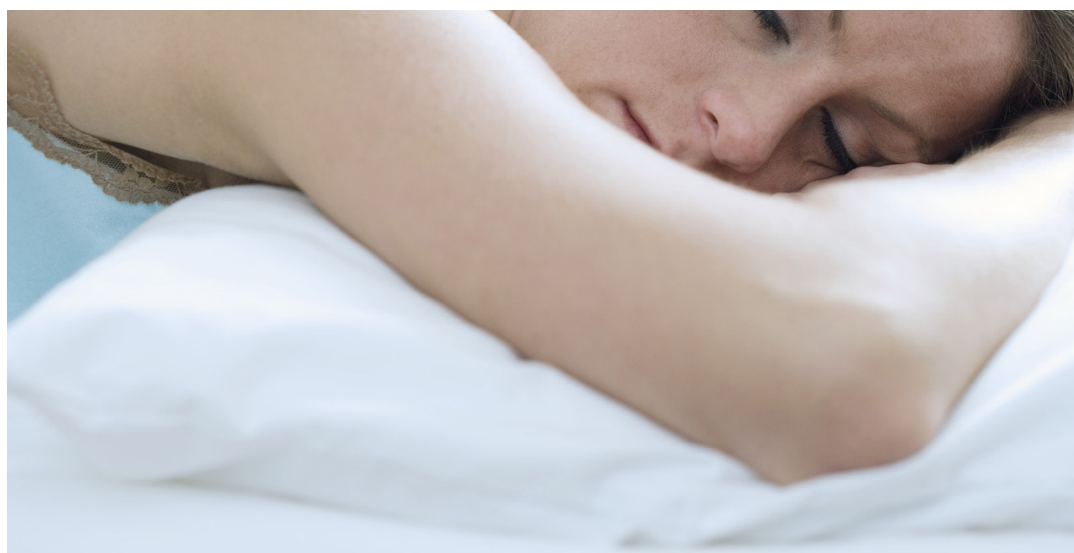


# Helpful Hints for Better Sleep



**For patients and family members who are having trouble sleeping**

This resource will help you:

- Know if you have a sleep problem
- Talk to your doctor about your sleep problem
- Know what to do to improve your sleep



## How do I know if I may have a sleep problem?

Answer the questions below to find out if you may have a sleep problem.

### Do you have trouble falling asleep?

- Do you have trouble sleeping even when you feel very tired?
- Do you have a hard time falling asleep?
- Do you wake up at night and cannot go back to sleep?
- Do you worry about things while trying to fall asleep?
- Do you find it hard to relax while in bed?
- Do you wake up feeling tired after sleeping all night?
- Do you wake up earlier in the morning than you would like?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a sleep problem. This resource will offer ideas to help you sleep better. You can try all the ideas or just try one idea at a time. Find an idea that works best for you.

## Talk to your doctor about your sleep problem

There are many things that can cause sleep problems. Ask your family doctor or your cancer doctor, if your sleep problems may be:

- a sign of other medical problems.
- caused by depression, anxiety or stress.
- a side effect of any of your medicines.

Some medicines can cause sleep problems. Sometimes heart, blood pressure, asthma, anxiety or depression medicines can affect sleep. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review:

- all your medicines.
- all herbal medicines you take.
- all over-the-counter medicines you take.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist, if you can change the time of day when you take your medicines. This change may lessen their impact on your sleep. For example, your doctor may suggest you take some medicines in the morning instead of at night. Talk to your doctor before making any changes.

## **What you can do to improve your sleep**

### **Exercise regularly**

Regular exercise can reduce your fatigue (feeling very tired) and help you sleep better.

- Start exercising slowly. For example, begin with 5 minutes of slow walking. Break your 15 minutes into 3 parts. Start with 5 minutes of slow walking. Then walk briskly for 5 minutes. Return to slow walking for the last 5 minutes.
- Increase the length of exercise sessions little by little. For example, add 2 minutes of exercise to each exercise session every 1 or 2 weeks. Listen to your body. Everyone is different.
- Avoid strenuous (hard to do) exercise 2 to 3 hours before you go to sleep at night.
- Read the “Canadian Physical Activity Guideline” pamphlet for exercise suggestions. This pamphlet is found online at: <http://csep.ca/en/home>.
- Think of ways to add exercise into your daily routine. For example, take breaks during the day to stretch or go for short 10 minute walk.
- Ask family, friends or coworkers join you to make the exercise more fun.

If you have other health conditions like arthritis or a heart disease, you may need a special exercise program. This program can be developed for you by a physiotherapist. Ask your health care team about programs that may be available to you.

### **Get natural light during the day**

Natural light like sunlight will help you maintain your sleep pattern.

- Get outside in natural sunlight for 30 minutes every day. Remember to wear sunscreen.
- Try “light therapy”. Light therapy involves using special lamps at certain times each day. Talk to your doctor about light therapy.

### **Reduce blue light at night**

Avoid screen time. Screen time is the use of electronics such as TVs, cell phones or computers. Electronics emit a lot of “blue light”.

Blue light lowers your natural melatonin levels. Melatonin is the hormone that helps you sleep. To lower the amount of blue light:

- Use dim red lights for night lights. Red light does not lower your natural melatonin level.
- Avoid looking at bright screens 2 to 3 hours before bed. This gives the melatonin in your body time to become active.
- Get an app for your device that removes the blue light at night. Many smart phones have filters that can be set to do this at certain times.

### **Avoid drinking too many liquids or eating heavy meals 2 hours before bedtime**

- Have a small light snack if you feel hungry, such as a small cup of milk.

## **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol 4 to 6 hours before bedtime**

Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants. A stimulant increases your energy and makes you more alert for a period of time. Caffeine can affect you for as long as 8 hours before it wears off.

Before you go to sleep avoid:

- Food or drinks with caffeine such as coffee, tea (black, green or iced), cocoa, chocolate or soft drinks like colas and Mountain Dew.
- Cigarettes.
- Drugs with nicotine like Nicorette and Nico Derm.
- Alcohol. Alcohol may cause you to wake up during the night.

## **Allow time to relax and clear your mind before going to sleep**

- Take 30 to 45 minutes before bed to deal with any worries that may keep you awake at night. Use this time to problem solve, plan or address your worries.

## **Use relaxation techniques**

Relaxation techniques are exercises that help you relax. Relaxing before bed will help you sleep.

- Use relaxation techniques to help you relax during the day and fall asleep at night. Read the "Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief" pamphlet (see the resources section).

## **Plan your naps**

If you need to take a nap:

- Try to take it before 3:00 pm so you can fall asleep at night more easily.
- Avoid napping more than an hour.

If you sleep a lot during the day, then you will have more trouble sleeping at night.

## **Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day**

- Get up if you do not fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes in bed. Do something boring to help you feel sleepy for example, read a dull book such as the manual for your stove or a high school textbook.

## **Have a bedtime routine that helps you relax and sleep**

Your bedtime routine can include:

- Reading for a few minutes before you go to sleep.
- Listening to relaxing music.
- Doing relaxation techniques.
- Having a hot bath 90 minutes before going to sleep.

## **Make sure you are comfortable**

Small changes to your bedroom can improve your sleep. Try the list below to make yourself more comfortable in bed:

- Adjust your room temperature. Try keeping your room slightly cool and have a few blankets to keep you warm if needed.
- Remove any distracting noise and lights.
- Use thick shades to keep your bedroom dark.
- Try to use your bed mainly for sleeping and sexual activities. Avoid using your bedroom as an office, workroom or recreation room. This will help your body learn that your bed is for sleeping.

## Resources for more information

To pick up the “Relaxing Exercises to Relieve Stress” pamphlet, visit the UHN Patient & Family Libraries or Resource Centres. To find more information:

- **UHN Patient and Family Education Program**  
Website: [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca)
- **Canadian Sleep Society**  
Website: <https://css-scs.ca>
- **Medline: Your Guide to Healthy Sleep**  
Website: [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sleepdisorders.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sleepdisorders.html)

**Important:** This is not a full list of brands or products. The University Health Network does not recommend one brand over another and is not responsible for any products listed. Please contact each company directly to find out more about their products.

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