Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia

This information explains cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I).

Insomnia is when you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up too early, or a combination of all these things.

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a therapy based on the idea that your thoughts, feelings, and actions are all connected. It's a type of talk therapy (therapy focusing on conversations between you and your healthcare provider) that helps you change your behavior.

About CBT-I

CBT-I is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy that helps you improve your sleeping habits without using medicine.

CBT-I includes:

- Learning about sleep
- Spending less time in bed
- Practicing sleep hygiene (healthy habits to improve your sleep)
- Therapy

You and your healthcare provider will work together for 4 to 8 weeks to figure out what's causing your insomnia and what you can do to treat it.

Learning about sleep

Your healthcare provider will teach you about sleep, including what happens while you sleep, how insomnia develops, and how you can treat it.

To learn more about insomnia, read the resources *Managing Insomnia* (www.mskcc.org/pe/insomnia) and *Improving Your Sleep During Your Hospital Stay* (www.mskcc.org/pe/sleep-hospital-stay)

Spending less time in bed

When you have insomnia, you may want to spend more time in bed to get more sleep. But spending more time in bed doesn't mean you'll spend more time sleeping. You and your healthcare provider will work together to set a sleep schedule. This is based on your sleep ability. Sleep ability is the amount of total time you are currently able to sleep. You'll keep track of your sleep with a sleep diary to better understand how you sleep.

To learn more about tracking your sleep with a sleep diary, read the resource *Improving Your Sleep at Home* (www.mskcc.org/pe/improving-sleep-home).

During your weekly visits, you and your healthcare provider will adjust your sleep prescription to help you sleep more over time. CBTI helps you spend more of your time in bed asleep.

Practicing sleep hygiene

When you have trouble sleeping or staying asleep, you may have anxiety around going to bed. You may also see your bed as a restless place. Through CBT-I, you'll work with your healthcare provider to help lower your anxiety around going to bed and see your bed as a place of rest.

Your healthcare provider will teach you healthy sleep habits, such as:

- Turning off the lights
- Turn off electronic devices before bed
- Limiting food and drinks before bed
- Making your bedroom comfortable

- Relaxing before bed
- Easing your mind
- Doing deep breathing exercises before going to bed
- Getting out of bed safely
- Following a bedtime routine every night

Therapy

Sometimes, not being able to sleep can make you have negative thoughts around sleep and going to bed. These negative thoughts can make your insomnia worse.

Some examples of negative thinking can include thinking if you don't get 8 hours of sleep or if you don't get the right amount of sleep, you won't be able to function the next day. You may also think that you'll get sick if you if you don't get enough sleep.

Your healthcare provider will work with you through talk therapy to figure out what negative thoughts you have about sleep and what you can do to manage them.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia - Last updated on August 6, 2026
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