



---

## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Improving Your Sleep During Your Hospital Stay

This information will help you improve your sleep during your hospital stay.

Sleeping well at night can make you feel better and give you more energy. It can also help you fight off infections and heal your wounds.

## Changes in Sleep Pattern

Some people have a hard time sleeping while they're in the hospital. Changes to your normal sleep pattern may be caused by lots of things. Here are some examples:

- Lighting in the hospital room may be too bright at night or too dark during the day.
- Treatments and checkups during the night may keep you awake. Your roommate getting care may also keep you up.
- Side effects from medications might keep you awake or make you sleepy during the day, so you can't fall asleep at night.

- Symptoms caused by your cancer or treatment, such as anxiety, pain, trouble breathing, or needing to go to the bathroom a lot.

## **Ways to Improve Sleep**

If you have trouble sleeping through the night or you feel tired the next day, try the ideas below:

### **Bring items from home**

You may want to bring some items to the hospital to help you sleep and make you feel more comfortable. If you don't already have these with you, you may want to ask someone to bring them for you.

These items can include:

- Earplugs
- An eye mask
- Headphones
- A bathrobe
- Slippers
- A pillow

## **During the Day**

## Let light in your room

- Open your window shades in the morning. Light helps your body know what time of the day it is.

## Get as much physical activity or exercise as you can

- Try to do some light physical activities, if you're able.
- Walk around the hospital floor, if you're able.
- Do exercises in your bed or chair. Ask your nurse for the resource *General Exercise Program: Level 1* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/general-exercise-1](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/general-exercise-1)).

## Limit your napping

- Taking naps in the late afternoon can make it harder for you to fall asleep at night.
- If you feel like you need to nap, take one earlier in the day and set an alarm to wake you up after 30 minutes.

## Speak with your healthcare provider

- Ask your doctor or nurse if they can change your medication schedule so that you aren't woken up during the night to take it.

## At Bedtime

## Limit food and drinks

- Avoid caffeine, such as coffee, black or green tea, sodas, and chocolate after noon.
- You should finish eating dinner 3 hours before you want to go to sleep.

## Take your sleep medication

- If you take sleep medication, ask your nurse to bring it to you 1 hour before you want to go to sleep.
- You should take your sleep medication between 9 p.m. and midnight, so you aren't sleepy the next day.

## Relax before bed

To relax before going to sleep, try any of the following relaxation activities:

- Deep breathing exercises. See the section “Deep Breathing Exercise” for instructions.
- Meditation. You can find guided meditations for sleep here: [www.mskcc.org/meditation](http://www.mskcc.org/meditation).
- Massage.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Reading.

## **Keep your room dark**

- Lower the blackout window shades.
- Close the curtains.
- Turn off the TV and computer screens.
- Use an eye mask.

## **Keep the room quiet**

- Silence your cell phone after 10 p.m.
- If you must keep the TV on, use headphones, so you don't disturb your roommate.
- Use earplugs to block out noise.
- Listen to white noise, such as a playlist with ocean sounds. Make sure to use headphones.

## **If you can't fall asleep**

Try to ease your mind with these strategies:

- If you can't get your mind off your worries, make a list of things you're worried about. Then, write down what you can do to stop or lessen that worry. For example, you may ask your doctor about a symptom or talk about your fears with a friend or family member. Tell yourself that you will do those things the next day.
- If you can't fall asleep, get up and take a short walk. You can also try a short activity, such as reading a book or

doing a crossword puzzle for 30 minutes. Then, do a relaxation activity.

## **Deep Breathing Exercise**

Deep breathing is an exercise that can help you relax. It's very simple, and you can teach it to yourself. It can help you clear your mind, release tension or stress and help you sleep better. You can do it any time you feel stressed or anxious.

1. Sit comfortably in a chair or lie in your bed. If you're lying in bed, raise your head on several pillows.
2. Place 1 hand on your stomach, just above your belly button. If you're right-handed, use your right hand. If you're left-handed, use your left hand.
3. Breathe out completely through your mouth.
4. If you can, close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Feel your stomach push up on your hand. Imagine that air is filling your whole body from the bottom up.
5. Pause for a couple of seconds. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth or nose. Try to breathe out completely and imagine the air leaving your lungs, mouth, or nose.
6. As you breathe out, allow your body to relax and go limp

—like a rag doll.

7. Repeat this exercise 5 to 10 times.

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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

---

Improving Your Sleep During Your Hospital Stay - Last updated on February 5, 2023

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center