



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Insomnia

This information explains what insomnia is and how you can manage it.

About Insomnia

Insomnia is when you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up too early, or a combination of all of these things. People with insomnia often have trouble going back to sleep after they wake up. Many people with cancer have insomnia.

There are 2 types of insomnia:

- **Acute insomnia** lasts less than 3 months and usually gets better on its own. Sometimes acute insomnia can turn into chronic insomnia.
- **Chronic insomnia** is when you have trouble sleeping for 3 or more nights per week for 3 months or longer.

Causes of Insomnia

Insomnia can be caused by many things, such as:

- Anxiety or stress caused by major life events, such as a cancer diagnosis or the death of a loved one. If you would like more information on managing anxiety or stress, read the resource *Managing Anxiety* (www.mskcc.org/pe/anxiety).
- Changes in your environment or work schedule, such as moving to a new place.
- Unhealthy sleeping habits, such as watching TV in bed or using your bed for activities other than sleep or sexual activity.
- Some medications.
- Medical problems.

Signs of Insomnia

The following things can be signs of insomnia:

- Trouble falling asleep
- Waking up often during the night and having trouble getting back to sleep
- Waking up too early in the morning

People with insomnia may feel very tired during the day and have low energy. They may also have trouble concentrating, which can affect the way they work or study.

If you have any of these signs, talk with your healthcare provider.

How to Manage Your Insomnia

No matter how long you've had insomnia, there are treatments that can help. The first step is to tell your healthcare team. They can guide you to the right resources.

Here are a few tips that can help:

- **Set a regular sleep schedule.** Having a regular schedule with a set sleep and wake time can help you fall asleep and wake up rested.
- **Do some light physical activity at least 2 to 3 hours before bed.** Light physical activity can be going for a walk or a short bike ride. Getting out into the fresh air and sunshine can help your body get ready for sleep at night.
- **Create an ideal sleep environment.** Make sure that the room you sleep in is cool, dark, and quiet. Your bed, pillow, and sheets should be comfortable for you. If you have pets and they're active at night, try not to let them sleep in your bed with you. Take them out of your bedroom or put them on the floor in their own bed. This will help keep them from disturbing you

while you sleep.

- **Relax and calm down before bed.** Avoid bright lights and stimulating activities before bedtime, such as vigorous exercise or stressful tasks for work. Try and create a calm and relaxing bedtime routine. You can do this by taking a hot shower or bath before bed, writing in a journal, reading, or doing gentle stretching exercises or yoga.
- **Try relaxation techniques.** Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, and acupressure (putting pressure on parts of your body to help you relax), can help you manage your anxiety and improve sleep. For more information, read the resource *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment* (www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies) or talk to your healthcare provider. You can also listen to free, guided meditations by visiting www.mskcc.org/meditation.
- **Avoid devices with blue light 2 to 3 hours before bedtime.** Blue light is the light that comes from electronic devices, such as your cellphone, tablet, computer, and LED light bulbs. Many electronic devices have a blue light filter that you can set for nighttime. You can also buy a pair of blue light blocking glasses to wear when using an electronic

device.

- **Talk with your healthcare provider about other treatments for insomnia.** Many integrative medicine therapies offered at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) can help treat or manage insomnia. Examples include cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) and acupuncture.
 - CBT-I is a type of talk therapy that helps people change their sleeping habits without using medication. It often works well for people with chronic insomnia. For more information about CBT-I, read the resource *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia* (www.mskcc.org/pe/cognitive_behavioral_therapy)
 - Acupuncture is a form of treatment in traditional Chinese medicine. It's done by applying very thin needles to certain points on your body. Research shows that acupuncture may help treat insomnia. To learn more about acupuncture, read the resource *About Acupuncture* (www.mskcc.org/pe/about_acupuncture).
 - For more information about other integrative medicine therapies that can help you manage your insomnia, read the resource *Integrative Medicine Therapies and Your Cancer Treatment*

(www.mskcc.org/pe/integrative_therapies).

Resources at MSK

Counseling Center

646-888-0200

Many people find that counseling helps them deal with emotions during cancer treatment. Our counselors provide counseling for individuals, couples, families, and groups. They can also prescribe medications to help with anxiety or depression.

Our counselors offer both inpatient and outpatient services. We're located at 641 Lexington Avenue. Enter on 54th Street (between Lexington and Third Avenues).

Integrative Medicine Service

www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine

Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. To schedule an appointment for these services, call 646-449-1010.

You can also schedule a consultation with a healthcare provider in the Integrative Medicine Service. They will work with you to come up with a plan for creating a

healthy lifestyle and managing side effects. To make an appointment, call 646-608-8550.

Hours

Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Location

Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center

205 East 64th Street (on 64th Street between Second and Third Avenue)

New York, NY 10065

Oncology Social Work

212-639-7020

Our oncology social workers provide emotional support and guidance to patients and their families and friends. Some of our services include ongoing in-person and online support groups for patients who are getting treatment and their caregivers. We can also help with practical issues, such as transportation problems and financial concerns, while you're getting treatment.

Oncology social workers are available on every patient floor of Memorial Hospital and at all MSK outpatient facilities, including our regional clinics. To speak with an oncology social worker, ask your doctor or nurse, or call the number listed above.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

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

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