

## If you have difficulty sleeping



This Information Sheet offers suggestions that may help if you have difficulty sleeping.

### Some helpful hints

Relax in the evening by doing something you enjoy, for example, reading or listening to music.

Try to wind down before you go to bed.

Have a regular routine for preparing for bed and regular time for bed.

Exercise during the day can help you sleep well.

If possible, do not use your bedroom as an office or study. The bedroom should be reserved for sleeping and sex, so that you link it with pleasurable feelings.

Try not to do work-related activities or use the computer too close to bedtime.

Ensure that your sleeping environment is as comfortable as possible, for example, a pleasant room temperature, darkness, low or no noise.

Some people find lavender relaxing. Try a lavender pillow or oil in the bath.

Naps during the day may be necessary if you are ill or have little energy but may contribute to your difficulty in sleeping at night.

Caffeinated coffee, tea, soft drinks and alcohol are stimulants. Drinking these before bed may keep you awake, but a warm bath and milky drink may be helpful.

To avoid having to get up to go to the bathroom during the night, avoid drinking just before bedtime. Go to the toilet before you go to bed.

Sometimes sedatives (sleeping pills) are helpful in the very short term. You may like to talk about this option with your doctor.

### Getting to sleep or back to sleep

If sleep does not come easily tell yourself it doesn't matter, resting and relaxing are good too.

If you have been awake for a while, get up and read or do something relaxing such as listening to music. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.

If you have things on your mind, write them down and tell yourself you'll deal with them in the morning.

Try not to look at the time and become frustrated with how long you have been awake or how much sleep you are missing.

If you can't sleep because of hot flushes, pain or nausea, talk to your doctor or nurse about ways to manage these.

### Relaxing exercises

When you go to bed, you could try saying these statements to yourself. You may prefer to record them to play to yourself as you go to sleep.

- I gently close my eyes and sigh out the cares of the day.
- I allow a gentle calming breath to come in and feel my abdomen gently rise.
- I breathe out slowly and completely. As I breathe out I empty my mind of thoughts and distractions.
- I am aware of them leaving my mind and I let them go.
- I let my thoughts flow out like a gentle river.
- My mind empties and the gentle waters calm me.
- I let go of my day and float peacefully and in contentment.
- I am at ease.

Some people find repeating one word helpful.

Listening to a voice guided relaxation and visualization CD may also be helpful.

## Stopping negative thoughts

If you find yourself going over and over the same worries, mentally, 'stop!' and refocus on your breathing.

Breathe slowly and smoothly, counting each inhale and exhale 'inhale one, exhale two, inhale one.

And repeat. As you do this feel the sensations of breathing in your nostrils, your windpipe, your chest and your abdomen and feel the warmth spreading through your body to your fingers and toes.

Develop a plan to pace yourself. Space activities out over the week. Plan rest periods between activities.

## Bad dreams

Bad dreams may cause anxiety. Some ways to relieve this may be to turn on the light or put your feet on the floor. Tell yourself it was just a dream and that you're alright. As you prepare to go to sleep again it may help to occupy your mind with pleasant pictures or to visualize a place in which you feel comfortable.

Ask your local Cancer Society for any useful reading or CDs on difficulties with sleeping.

If you are having difficulty sleeping, try relaxation exercises, a warm bath, a milky drink or both. Sleeping tablets can be helpful in the short term. Discuss this option with your doctor.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

If you smoke, try to quit.

## Recommended reading

Dr McCarthy, Patrick. (2012). *Relax: Say Goodbye to Anxiety and Panic*. Wellington: Huia Publishers.

Johnson, Fiona. (2001). *Getting a Good Night's Sleep*. London. Sheldon Press.

American Cancer Society. (2011). *Imagine What's Possible: Using the Power of our Mind to Help Take Control of Your Life During Cancer*. USA: American Cancer Society.