

Sleep problems

Many people affected by cancer have [trouble sleeping](#). Long periods of sleeplessness can lead to anxiety, depression, concentration problems or difficulty making decisions. If you are worried that disturbed sleep is affecting you, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse.

It can sometimes help to take a short course of sleeping tablets. Your doctor can advise whether tablets are suitable for you. There are also some behavioural therapies that can be used for improving sleep. Talk to your GP if you think these might help you

Tips for managing sleep problems

- Have a regular bedtime routine. For example, have a caffeine-free hot drink, take a warm bath and read in bed for a while.
- Spending too much time in bed is likely to affect the quality of your sleep. Try to sleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next day, without oversleeping. Most adults need between 7 and 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Doing more [physical activity](#) during the day can improve the quality of your sleep. Even something small will help, such as regular, short walks or gentle gardening.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning. This is not always possible, but it can help you get into a good sleep routine.
- Keep your bedroom for sleeping. If you wake up during the night and find it difficult to go back to sleep, go to another room in your home until you feel ready to sleep again.
- Make your bedroom a relaxing place. Try to keep your bedroom dark, quiet and comfortable. Dark curtains or a blind can help to reduce the amount of light. If your room is either very hot or very cold, this may affect your sleep. The room temperature should be comfortable.
- Being hungry can disturb your sleep. Try having a light bedtime snack, warm milk or a hot drink before going to bed. Avoid large meals and lots of fluids. Also avoid drinks that contain stimulants, such as caffeine, or lots of sugar, such as chocolate.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink before bedtime. Alcohol can help you fall asleep more quickly, but your sleep is usually interrupted.
- You may find that short, daytime naps help you sleep better at night. Or you may sleep less well after a nap. Try to understand how naps affect you. Find out what suits you best.
- Mental exercises could also help you sleep as they focus your brain away from any worries. You could try to remember the lyrics of a song, or a favourite experience in detail.
- Get out of bed if you cannot sleep. Try to empty your mind. You could read or do some relaxation techniques, then try going back to bed after 10 minutes. Some people find listening to an audiobook or podcast or watching a relaxing programme on TV can help them sleep.
- If you are [worried and anxious](#), you may find talking to someone about your fears and worries will help. You could talk to a family member or friend. Or you might prefer to talk to someone outside your family.
- If you wake at night and are worried about things, write them down. You can then work through them the next day.
- Simple breathing and relaxation techniques may help reduce anxiety and stress. You can learn them at home using CDs or podcasts. Or you may prefer to join a group.
- Many medicines can disturb sleep. Talk to your doctor, specialist nurse or pharmacist about whether your medicines may be affecting your sleep. They may be able to give you advice.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- [Cancer and complementary therapies](#)
- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer.](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our **Online Community**.

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- British Complementary Medicine Association – visit www.bcma.co.uk
- British Holistic Medical Association – visit www.bhma.org
- British Reflexology Association – visit www.britreflex.co.uk

Notes and questions
