

## **Managing your Cancer Related Insomnia**

### **What is insomnia?**

Insomnia is a disruption in your usual sleeping pattern such as, trouble falling asleep, or awakening early and being unable to fall back to sleep. Not getting enough sleep can cause problems during the day such as tiredness, poor concentration, irritability and low energy. Sleep difficulties can cause other cancer related symptoms to worsen, such as pain, fatigue, and anxiety. It can also decrease a person's ability to cope and cause feelings of isolation.

If you are experiencing insomnia, talk to your doctor about your symptoms.

### **What causes insomnia?**

People who are diagnosed with cancer or a serious illness are at a higher risk for experiencing insomnia. Factors that may contribute to insomnia are:

- A previous history of a sleep disorder
- A change in sleep environment
- An uncomfortable sleep environment
- Exercising immediately before bed
- Watching TV, or reading in bed
- Depression or anxiety
- Pain
- Difficulty breathing, e.g. shortness of breath, or coughing.

- Nausea
- Itching
- Side effects of medications
- Use of caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco
- Withdrawal from medication
- Poor sleeping habits
- Stress, emotional distress or worry

### **How can I manage my insomnia?**

You can improve your sleep by maintaining healthy sleep habits. Identifying any sources of insomnia such as pain, depression or anxiety and treating those problems can improve your symptoms. Treatment of these underlying causes may also improve insomnia. Talk to your doctor about your insomnia and the potential causes.

Here are some suggestions that may help you to manage your insomnia:

- Go to sleep and get up at the same time every day.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet room. Make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature.
- Start a bed time routine, such as reading or taking a bath. However, do not read in bed: sit in a chair or read in another room.

- Consider sleeping in a separate room or separate bed if your partner keeps you awake.
- Exercise daily and choose a time that is not close to bedtime. Even moderate exercise such as walking will help.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol use, as well as smoking before bed.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Keep a journal of your experiences and thoughts.

There are also behavioral treatments and medications to help you sleep better. Talk to your doctor about your insomnia and discuss treatment options.

Behavioral approaches may include relaxation therapy, such as listening to relaxation tapes, praying or meditating; doing breathing exercises; or seeking professional therapy to learn biofeedback, relaxation, and/or hypnosis.

At Danbury Praxair Cancer Center, we have a complementary medicine RN practitioner who teaches relaxation techniques and breathing techniques that you can use to help you relax at bedtime.

### **Additional Resources**

- Peggy O'Shea Complementary Medicine RN (203-739-7073)
- National Cancer Institute (800-4-CANCER) [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- American Cancer Society (800-ACS-2345) [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- ASCO [www.Cancer.net](http://www.Cancer.net)

- Livestrong Foundation cancer support (866-673-7205) [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

**Notes/Additional Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

Sources:  
 The American Cancer Society @ [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)  
 ASCO Cancer.net

10/2010