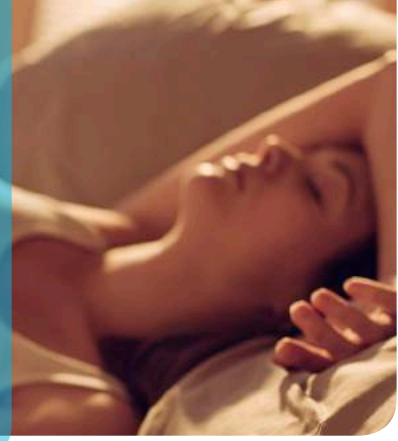


Sleep



What is the connection between sleep and blood cancer?

Sleep is an important part of restoring health during and after blood cancer treatment although it can often be an ongoing problem.

Many people receiving treatment for a blood cancer or recovering from one, experience problems sleeping and disruptions to their usual sleep patterns. For many blood cancer patients, the interruptions to normal sleep patterns can be due to the side effects of treatment such as nausea and pain as well as certain treatments like steroids.

A blood cancer diagnosis may turn your normal day-to-day routines upside down. Sudden changes to your lifestyle such as travelling to and from hospital, sleeping in a hospital bed, eating different foods or not being able to eat your usual foods can all impact the quality of your sleep.

The experience of being diagnosed with a blood cancer and the months and years during treatment and beyond can be a very emotionally distressing time. Many people find themselves dealing with psychological issues such as anxiety and low mood, which can become worse from a lack of solid, regular sleep. It is important that you talk to your haematologist and healthcare team about any symptoms of sleeplessness to find the best option for getting your sleep back into a normal routine.

Sleep requirements

The average amount of sleep needed is around 7.5-8.5 hours of sleep per 24 hours, which is around one third of the day.

The stages of sleep

When you drift off to sleep, you immediately enter the first stage of sleep, which is a transition stage between alertness and falling asleep. It is easy to be roused from this stage by things like background noises and voices.

The second stage signals the onset of sleep where your body temperature and blood pressure drop and your breathing and heart rate slow down. By the third stage, your muscles relax further and you are less able to respond to external activity.

When you reach stage four, your body will experience the deepest and most restorative form of sleep where Rapid-Eye Movement (REM) usually occurs. This stage is often referred to as 'paradoxical sleep' as the mind is very active, but from the neck down, the human body is least responsive to the surrounding environment. In this stage, the brain's temperature is also at its lowest, and breathing, heart rate and blood pressure are all reduced under the influence of the nervous system. We usually spend a total of about one quarter of the night in REM sleep.



What is insomnia and what causes it?

Many people experience insomnia at some point during their lives however the chance of developing insomnia may increase in blood cancer patients.

Insomnia usually occurs when a person experiences persistent sleep problems lasting longer than one month and has difficulty falling asleep, waking in the night or waking early. Insomnia can be caused by psychiatric and medical conditions, unhealthy sleep habits, specific substances, and/or certain biological factors. Insomnia often causes other cancer-related conditions and symptoms to worsen, including pain, fatigue, or depression or anxiety. It is important to seek advice from your medical team to treat the underlying causes.

What are the effects of insomnia?

- Low mood and irritability.
- Poor memory and concentration.
- Trouble staying alert.
- Anxiety about not sleeping.
- Low work performance.
- Conflict in relationships.
- Poor quality of life.

What can you do to improve the quality of your sleep?

Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality night time sleep and full daytime alertness.

Below is a list of some practical recommendations for good sleep hygiene:

- Avoid watching TV, using a computer or reading in bed. Reserve the bed for sleeping and sex and nothing else.
- Establish consistent sleep and wake schedules and try to avoid weekend 'sleep-ins' so your routine isn't interrupted.
- To avoid excess grogginess when napping, be sure to nap for less than 30 minutes. If you feel you need a longer nap, time it for exactly 1.5 hours as this will perfectly time with the body's sleep cycle ensuring you wake during a light level of sleep.
- Create a regular relaxing bedtime routine soaking in a hot bath, or listening to soothing music. Begin an hour before the time you are expecting to fall asleep.
- Utilise sleep rituals, relaxing stretches, breathing exercises, sitting calmly with caffeine free tea.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
- Finish eating and exercising at least two to three hours before your regular bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime and give up smoking.
- Avoid clock watching and frequently checking the time during the night.
- If you wake in the night and don't get back to sleep, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy and then return to bed.

For more information please contact Support Services on 0800 15 10 15 or supportservices@leukaemia.org.nz

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