



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

# DIFFICULTY SLEEPING: TIPS TO RELAX BEFORE BEDTIME

**Anxiety is very common, whether you are in remission or recently diagnosed. For some, it occurs when they wake up, and for others, as they try to go to sleep.**

## WAYS TO RELAX BEFORE BEDTIME

**Find Light.** The dark can be an especially scary place for people facing a life-threatening illness. Absence of light is a metaphor of the darkness of unknowing. Turning on the light, even dimly, can provide comfort and a sense of control, allowing you to relax and fall asleep.

**Mindful meditation.** Using mindful meditation, focus on your breath while non-judgmentally looking at your thoughts when your mind wanders, especially thoughts of worry. When you feel anxious, gently bring your focus back to your breath. Breath, specifically oxygen, is life, which fuels us, and aims to keep us in balance. Anxiety makes us take short breaths depriving our body and mind of oxygen and making us more anxious. When anxiety is high, take a deep breath, hold it for a comfortable amount of time, then release it, and repeat. You can do this for a few minutes or until you fall gently to sleep. You might also try listening to a pre-recorded guided imagery exercise, if you have difficulty meditating on your own.



**Breathing exercises.** At the core of life is breath. Laughing and sighing are the body's natural ways of getting us to breathe deeply.

That is why we often feel calmer or rejuvenated after these experiences. Anxiety and stress can make us take short, shallow breaths. Shallow breathing, which does not allow enough oxygen to enter our bodies, can make us even more anxious. Try this four-step breathing exercise.

It can be done anywhere, anytime:

1. Take in a deep breath from your diaphragm (this is the muscle between your lungs and abdomen).
2. Hold the breath for several seconds—however long is comfortable for you—and then exhale slowly.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 two more times.
4. Afterward, relax for a moment and let yourself feel the experience of being calm

(over)

**Calm the racing mind.** Thinking about unfinished business, especially if there is a perceived timeline, often makes people anxious. With the worry of cancer it can be hard to focus on individual tasks, thereby increasing one's anxiety. Try writing down the things you need to take care of, and then prioritize them. Use creative visualization by imagining yourself doing and finishing each task, and enjoying a sense of accomplishment as each task is completed. These visualizations can serve as a first step and increasing the likelihood of completion, which in turn can free you of the worry that is keeping you awake at bedtime.

### ADDITIONAL TIPS TO CONSIDER

- Avoid caffeinated beverages 6 to 8 hours before your planned bedtime.
- Make sure the temperature before you go to bed is not too hot or too cold.
- Have someone give you a massage or back rub before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol, which can disrupt sleep.
- Have a warm drink, like decaffeinated tea, before bedtime. But do not consume too many fluids.
- Try to maintain a routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time.



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