

Patient Resource Guide: Insomnia

INTRODUCTION

Sleep is an important part of life. It is essential for well-being. Disruptions in sleep can have negative impacts extending beyond just feeling tired. Lack of sleep or disruptions in normal sleep cycles can result in increased stress, anxiety, agitation and depression. These can negatively affect enjoyment of activities, relationships and quality of life. Taking steps to improve sleep can have widespread benefits.

COMMON CAUSES OF SLEEP DISTURBANCE

Identifying causes of sleep disturbance is a helpful first step to healthy sleep habits. The following table provides an overview of situations in the hospice setting that can lead to decreased quantity or quality of sleep.

COMMON FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INSOMNIA				
SYMPTOMS				
Depression	At least 90% of depressed patients have abnormal sleep patterns, and is a significant cause of sleep pathology in the terminally ill			
Uncontrolled Pain	Contributes to a lack of sleep in up to 60% of patients; sleep deprivation also lowers pain threshold			
Anxiety/Fear	May be directly related to the illness or treatment and is often associated with pain. Early delirium, withdrawal or respiratory symptoms can also contribute to anxiety.			
Restless Legs Syndrome	May be associated with potentially manageable causes such as medication sedative hypnotic withdrawal or peripheral neuropathy			
MEDICATIONS				
Steroid Therapy	Psychiatric Meds	Antidepressant Therapy	Sedative Med Withdrawal	Pain Med Withdrawal
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS				
Nocturnal Disruption	Resulting from excessive noise or lights; if patient is admitted in a facility or hospital, shift change assessments can cause a patient to wake			
Sleep/Wake Disorder	Disruption of normal schedule resulting in excessing napping during the day and nighttime wakefulness			
Substance Use	Use of caffeine, nicotine, other stimulants, or alcohol may contribute to sleep disturbances.			

ADDRESSING INSOMNIA

NON-MEDICATION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS INSOMNIA	
BEHAVIORAL	
Relaxation Therapies	Use of various relaxation techniques just prior to bedtime can positively impact sleep. These techniques include <i>progressive muscle relaxation exercises, guided imagery, meditation, or breathing exercises</i>
Sleep Hygiene	Keep a regular schedule- going to bed and waking at same times each day
	Avoid long daytime naps whenever possible
	Avoid or limit alcohol and caffeine intake
Stimulus Control	Focuses on establishing a connection between the bed and sleep, emphasizing not watching TV, reading in bed, or using bedroom for any other activity than sleep or sexual activity
PHYSICAL	
Exercise	Although the data is limited, studies in patients with advanced age suggest significantly improved sleep with low impact aerobic exercise
Tai Chi	Low-impact, slow-motion exercise during which breathing deeply and naturally, allows for the focusing of attention on your bodily sensations and can be easily adapted for almost anyone, regardless of their physical limitation

There may also be times when a medication is necessary in order to allow the patient to sleep. Please discuss the best options with your hospice care team if non-medication efforts do not result in improved sleep.