
HNA Prompt Sheet: Insomnia/Difficulty Sleeping

Insomnia, or difficulty sleeping, is a common problem following a cancer diagnosis, and cancer treatments. It is one of the three most frequently reported problems in holistic needs assessment analysis (HNA). The causes are multi-factorial, covering physical, emotional and psychological domains and include hot flushes, altered sleep patterns as a result of fatigue, and anxiety and worry. The intervention needed to mitigate sleep disturbance will depend on the underlying cause. The suggestions below may help you to assess and begin to address the possible causes.

Have you considered?

- Assessing and, if possible, ameliorating any physical cause, e.g. pain or other symptoms
- Checking whether the person is taking any medication that affects sleep, e.g. steroids, some chemotherapeutic agents, anticonvulsants or antihypertensives
- Assessing the person's mood (remember, psychological problems can cause and perpetuate sleeplessness)
- If you are able, teaching the patient relaxation techniques that can be used during the day and during acute bouts of insomnia
- If the person is physically well, encouraging sleep restriction – this means no sleep during the day, less time spent in bed at night, and going to bed and getting up at a regular time
- Advocating other aspects of sleep hygiene – e.g. where possible use the bed/bedroom only for sleep; no stimulating caffeinated drinks or alcohol immediately before bed; adjust room/body temperature
- The role of physical activity

Services which may be able to help

- Psychological support services
- Local mindfulness or yoga classes
- Complementary therapies
- GP for temporary prescribing of sedatives
- Macmillan Information Centre
- Local cancer support centres, e.g. Maggie's Centres, The Mulberry Centre, The Haven

Patient information

Macmillan Cancer Support: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/other-side-effects/difficulty-sleeping.html>

American Cancer Society:

<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/physicalsideeffects/dealingwithsymptomsathome/caring-for-the-patient-with-cancer-at-home-sleep-problems>

National Sleep Foundation: <https://sleepfoundation.org/insomnia/home>

The Sleep Council: <http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk/>