



## **Sleep Symptom Spotlight Webinar: Questions & Answers**

**Note:** These questions were asked during the Symptom Spotlight Webinar on Sleep. Any person seeking to apply or consult these answers for practice, is expected to use independent clinical judgement in the context of individual clinical circumstances or seek out the supervision of a qualified specialist clinician. Ontario Health makes no representation or warranties of any kind whatsoever regarding their content, use, or application, and disclaims responsibility for their application or use in any way.

**1. Are there certain cancer mediations/supportive medications (e.g. steroids) that tend to create sleep issues for patients with cancers?**

For patients with cancer with sleep issues, steroids, opiates, hormone therapy, sedatives and tranquilizers, antidepressants, and anticonvulsants can all have an impact on sleep cycles and circadian rhythms. By far, steroids are the most common cause of insomnia in patients with cancer on treatment. Taking steroids as early in the day as possible is the most effective intervention to help mitigate that side effect. In extreme cases, changing therapy or reducing the steroid doses may be needed. In some cases, sleep medication may be prescribed.

**2. Are there suggested interventions to manage sleep issues for patients on these medications that create sleep issues?**

It is beneficial for patients to schedule their medication, if possible. Taking corticosteroids earlier in the day can assist in managing the sleep issues. This also means that the patient may need to adjust the times of their other medications or doses of other medications. If possible, patients should also avoid sedatives and tranquilizers. Here are few other resources:

- For cancer medications, some [drug monographs](#) on the Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) Drug Formulary, list the incidence of sleep disorders, in the adverse effects section.
- BC Cancer provides general information on sleeping problems for patients: [Sleeping Problems \(bccancer.bc.ca\)](http://bccancer.bc.ca)
- BC Cancer has also compiled a list of other websites with patient info on sleep problems: [Sleeping Problems Websites \(bccancer.bc.ca\)](http://bccancer.bc.ca)

**3. Do you have suggestions for people who get up early in the morning and are unable to fall asleep?**

Suggestions include:

- It's a good idea to get out of bed and out of the bedroom altogether any time you're unable to sleep, whether it's at the beginning, middle, or end of the night. Go to another room and engage in a quiet, non-stimulating activity until you feel sleepy enough to get back into bed.

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- If it's almost time for you to wake up, get up and out of bed and start your day early.
  - Resist napping the next day, as you want to maintain your sleep drive/pressure to sleep for the next night.
  - Resist the urge to go to bed earlier the next night as well. Stay up until your usual bedtime and remind yourself that you'll make it through the day even if it feels tough in the moment.
  - Some people end up waking up earlier than planned because they're trying to sleep longer than their bodies are able to sleep. Get to know your body's sleep patterns and only plan to stay in bed around the same amount of time that matches your two-week average sleep time. For example, if someone's two-week average sleep time is around 6.5 hours/night and they would like to regularly wake up for 8 am, they would realistically expect to have a bedtime of 1:30 am.

#### **4. Are blue light lenses in your prescription glasses effective to prevent sleep disturbance if on your device before bed?**

There is evidence that “blue-blocking glasses” can help shorten the length of time it takes to fall asleep when worn in the evening, but it's probably a better idea to use your device's built-in blue light filters (e.g., night mode, night shift, etc.) which can be set to activate every night after a certain time<sup>1</sup>. It is important to remember that blue spectrum light is essential in the mornings and throughout most of the day. You don't want to limit exposure to blue-spectrum light until later in the evening. So, if you're wearing these types of lenses throughout the day, you will be reducing your exposure to important environmental cues to help you feel awake and alert in the daytime. You would want to ensure that you are only using them in the evenings and not earlier in the day.

#### **References**

1. Hester L, Dang D, Barker CJ, Heath M, Mesiya S, Tienabeso T, Watson K. Evening wear of blue-blocking glasses for sleep and mood disorders: a systematic review. *Chronobiology International*. 2021 Oct 3;38(10):1375-83. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34030534/>