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Want to Prevent Cancer? Make Sure You Sleep Well

**By Dr. Joseph Mercola
with Rachael Droeg**

Many of us rush through our days and nights without taking the time to get a good night's sleep. Would you pay more attention to your sleep habits if they could help to prevent cancer? Well, they certainly can, so if you feel you need a good excuse to get some quality sleep, this is it.

How well you sleep can seriously alter the balance of hormones in your body. This can then disrupt your sleep/wake cycle, also called the circadian rhythm. A disrupted circadian rhythm may [influence cancer progression](#) through shifts in hormones like melatonin, which the brain makes during sleep.

According to [Brain Behavior Immunology October 2003](#), having a regular circadian rhythm may be necessary in order for your body to defend against cancer, and sleep/wake rhythms that are [disrupted due to stress](#) or other issues may promote cancer growth.

Melatonin is an antioxidant that helps to suppress harmful free radicals in the body and slows the production of estrogen, which can activate cancer. When your circadian rhythm is disrupted, your body may produce less melatonin and therefore may have less ability to fight cancer.

Exposure to light during the night can also reduce melatonin levels, which is why it is important to [sleep in total darkness to decrease the risk of cancer](#). Another link between cancer and the disrupted circadian rhythm lies with a [hormone called cortisol](#), which normally reaches peak levels at dawn then declines throughout the day. Cortisol is one of many hormones that help regulate immune system activity, including the activity of a group of immune cells called natural-killer cells that help the body battle cancer.

Yet another mechanism that may be related to the cancer/sleep association is the hormone insulin. University of Chicago researchers have repeatedly shown that [insufficient sleep will result in an increased rate of diabetes](#) due to increased insulin resistance, and [insulin has been clearly linked to cancer](#) in previous studies.

We all know that sleep is important. The research is quite clear that insufficient rest will result in increased rates of cancer and diabetes, while optimizing your sleep can slow down the aging process. If you need some help getting a good night's sleep, you can review the [sleep guidelines that](#) seem to help many of our patients.

I recently attended a conference with Dr. Deepak Chopra and thought that many could also benefit from the following tips from his Insomnia Protocol:

- **The natural human biorhythm is to sleep between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.** This means you should be in bed, with the lights out, by 10 p.m. and be up by 6 a.m. If this is difficult for you, keep in mind that people naturally followed this pattern

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before the advent of electricity. When the time switches in two weeks ideally you should be in bed by 9 PM since this is equal to 10 p.m. prior to the time switch.

- **Decrease your mental activity after dinner.** [Journaling](#) may help in this process by allowing you to put your anxieties on paper and get them out of your mind.
- **Make preparations for the next day**, such as determining what you'd like to accomplish, so you don't have to think about it.
- **Take a hot bath for up to an hour with calming fragrances** (lavender, vanilla, sandalwood) 30 minutes before bedtime. Use the bath to let go of your daily stress, include soothing lights and music and massage your body with oils.
- **Use your bed for sleep and sex only.** Even reading should be done elsewhere, unless it has a calming effect, such as spiritual literature.
- **Turn all lights off.** Lie on your back and focus on they way your body feels (your mind-body awareness) and on your breathing.
- **Try reciting a mantra for five minutes.** This could be some sort of favorite sound or prayer that you recite continuously.
- **Something warm, like a hot water bottle, may help soothe your anxieties**, especially when placed between the navel and bottom of rib cage.
- **If you wake during the night, try repeating some of the techniques above or massaging your head or feet.**
- **If you find it difficult to sleep in your bed, pick another area of the house to sleep in.**

Related Articles:

[Sleep Problems May Complicate Many Illnesses](#)

[Sleep Tight with Melatonin](#)

[Continued Insanity--Sleep Medications to Kids](#)

[Sleep-Deprived Children More Prone to Injury](#)

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