Handout: Sleep and Skillfully Using Mindfulness for Sleep

Cancer survivors often report difficulty sleeping. We also know that many people use cigarettes and alcohol in a way that seems to help, but may actually further disrupt sleep. Below are direct statements from cancer survivors relating to sleep, followed by recommendations for sleep.

"I discovered that most times, when I struggled to sleep, I tend to reach out to smoking or drinking to help me… it makes me more able to sleep."

"I noticed that now that I'm not drinking, I'm waking up like every hour. I would drink the wine to kinda calm down, mellow out, and maybe get a good night's sleep."

"And it's very stressful. And the first thing I would do when I'd walk in the door was grab that glass of wine. After about two or three, I could easily smoke two packs of cigarettes. And then that wine would put me to sleep, and I'd be fine the next day… Sometimes, I'd overdo it. But for the most part, I would keep it at four glasses of wine. But then when I'm drinking, it just goes hand in hand. You just want that cigarette along with that wine."

Basic Sleep Hygiene

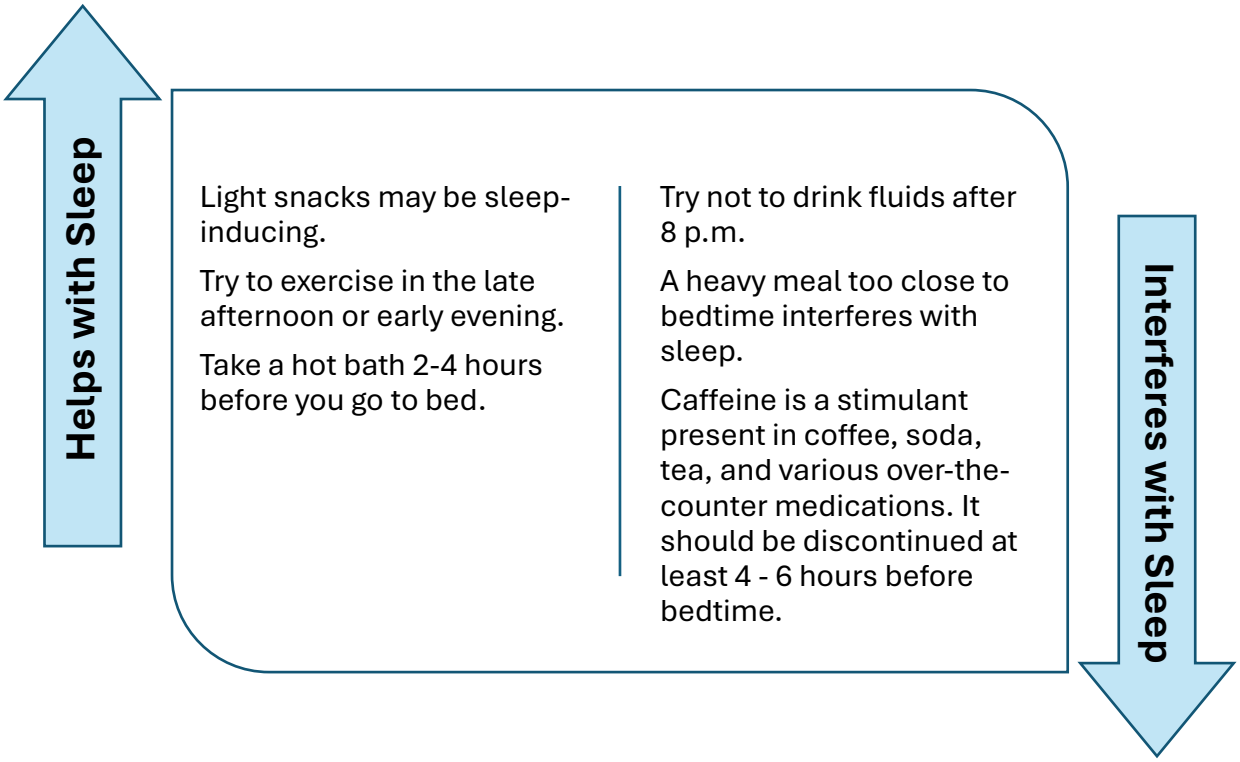
Some tips for good napping:

- Naps as short as 5 minutes can improve alertness and certain memory processes. Most people benefit from limiting naps to 15-45 minutes. You may feel groggy and unable to concentrate after a longer nap.
- Nap early in the afternoon. Napping too late may disrupt your nighttime sleep.

Impact of Smoking and Alcohol on Falling Asleep

	Smoking	Alcohol
What it does:	• Nicotine is a stimulant	• Alcohol is a depressant
Why it feels helpful:	• Smoking may reduce irritability & restlessness • Relieves nicotine withdrawal, helping you relax temporarily	• May help you fall asleep faster
Impact on sleep:	• Can delay falling asleep • Leads to lighter, less restful sleep	• Disrupts deep sleep • Increases night awakenings • Sleep feels less refreshing

Hours Leading into Bedtime



Going to Bed

- **Cut down on your time in bed before you fall asleep.** The longer one stays in bed beyond the time that is actually required for sleeping, the more shallow and unsatisfactory sleep becomes.
- **Avoid doing these things in bed**:
  - Watching TV
  - Using technology
  - Eating
  - Discussing emotional issues
- **The bed should be used for sleep and sex only.** If not, we can associate the bed with other activities, and it often becomes difficult to fall asleep.
- **Minimize noise, light, and temperature** extremes during sleep using earplugs, window blinds, or an electric blanket or air conditioner. Even the slightest nighttime noises or luminescent lights can disrupt the quality of your sleep.
- **Try to keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature** – not too hot (above 75 degrees) or too cold (below 54 degrees).

Once in Bed

- **Do not expose yourself to bright light** if you need to get up at night.
- **Avoid "trying to sleep."** The more you try to sleep, the more awake you will become. Lying in bed, frustrated and unable to sleep, needs to be avoided. As long as you lie in bed comfortably and relaxed, continue to do so.
- **Establish a regular wake up time.** Even after nights when you slept very little or not at all, it is still important to get up at the same time as if you had to keep the 2-hour rhythm. Get up at the same time on weekends and weekdays.
- **Avoid a bedroom clock.** It is very difficult to relax and fall asleep when you see time slipping by. When you go to bed, set the alarm for the next morning, but then hide the clock far away from the bed or in a dresser drawer.

Mindfulness for Sleep

Although we usually do not recommend meditation as a direct pathway to fall asleep, mindfulness can be used skillfully to help with sleep. For example, by paying attention (being mindful) to what may be impacting your sleep, you may change underlying issues. For example, you may need to purchase a new pillow!

To help you fall asleep, try the following:

- Focus on your breathing. You may count your breaths, or simply note "breathing in, breathing out."
- Listen to a guided meditation, perhaps one focused on sleep or relaxation.
- Notice areas of tension or distress in the body and send the breath to those areas as a way of relaxation.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions have been widely reported to improve sleep quality and reduce fatigue among cancer survivors, providing strong evidence on the utility of mindfulness for improving sleep and reducing fatigue.