

# Sleep Disturbance

## What is happening

Changes in sleep patterns are very common during serious illness and hospice care.

Sleep problems may include:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking frequently during the night
- Sleeping more during the daytime
- Restlessness at night

These changes are often related to both physical and emotional factors.

## Common causes

Sleep problems may be caused by:

- Pain
- Shortness of breath
- Anxiety or worry
- Depression
- Restless legs or discomfort

Other contributing factors may include:

- Medication side effects
- Excess caffeine or alcohol
- Changes in routine or environment:
  - New bed
  - Different room
  - Noise, light, or heat

## What you may see

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Frequent waking
- Increased daytime sleeping
- Restlessness or nighttime agitation
- Fatigue or irritability

## What you can do first

**Check for common physical causes**

- Ask if pain is present
- Ask if breathing feels more difficult
- Consider whether anxiety or worry may be contributing

Use medications as directed by the hospice team if symptoms are present.

### **Improve the sleep environment**

- Reduce noise and stimulation before sleep
- Keep lighting soft and the room comfortable
- Limit caffeine or stimulating activities later in the day

If possible:

- Make sure the sleeping arrangement feels comfortable and familiar

### **Emotional support**

Sometimes worries or emotional distress contribute to poor sleep.

If appropriate, gently ask:

“Is there something bothering you that you would like to talk about?”

Quiet reassurance and presence may help.

## **Medications**

### **Anxiety medications**

Lorazepam and similar medications may help reduce anxiety and improve sleep.

### **Pain medications**

Pain and shortness of breath commonly interfere with sleep.

Morphine and other opioid medications may help:

- Reduce pain
- Ease breathing discomfort
- Improve rest and comfort

Use medications as directed by the hospice team.

## **What to discuss with hospice**

Tell the hospice team if:

- Sleep problems are causing significant distress
- You think a new problem may be contributing
- You are concerned about medication side effects
- You would like to discuss additional options for sleep support

### **When to call hospice**

- Severe agitation or confusion develops
- Pain or shortness of breath is worsening
- Medications do not seem to help
- Excessive sleepiness or difficulty waking occurs
- You are unsure how to manage symptoms safely