



PATHWAYS

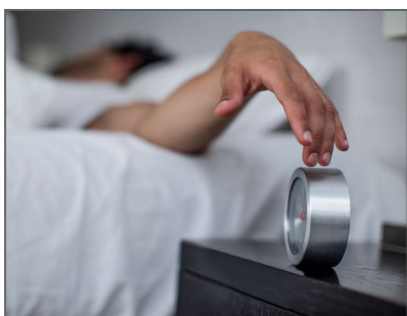
A Study of Breast Cancer Survivorship

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

WINTER 2023

Sleep After Breast Cancer

We have all heard how important sleep is for our health. The stress of a cancer diagnosis and treatment on the body and mind can make sleep more difficult, yet it is important for healing. Even after treatment has ended, many survivors have trouble sleeping occasionally. For



some of us, sleep can be a struggle.

So, what happens and what can we do about it? We looked at this question in the Pathways Study, spoke with three

study participants, and consulted an expert to find out.

More than 9 years after their breast cancer diagnosis, 31% of Pathways participants reported very good sleep, just over half (53%) said they had fairly good sleep and 15% had fairly poor or very poor sleep. About half of those answering the survey had trouble getting to sleep, and 61% reported waking in the middle of the night or early morning.

How Much is Enough?

Experts say we need an average of 7-9 hours of sleep a night. We need it to:

- Remember things and think clearly
- Clean out our brain (glial lymphatic or glymphatic system)
- Grow and repair cells
- Rebuild energy

Routinely getting less than 7 hours of sleep can cause health problems, such as:

- Being overweight and obesity
- Heart disease
- Diabetes and blood sugar control
- Depression (which can also cause sleep problems)

Two of the three participants we interviewed reported that they don't function well the next day if they get less than 7-8 hours of sleep and are "grouchy" and "draggy". For the third member, getting 6 hours was fine in the past, and now it is harder.



About one-third of us do not regularly get 7 hours of sleep, and it is almost half for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Black and Multiracial Americans. <https://zbcclink.org/cdc-sleep>

Then again, some studies show that sleeping 9 or more hours a night can be associated with some of those same health problems!

So, what is the answer? Dr. Mia Zaharna of Kaiser Permanente San Jose's Sleep Medicine Laboratory says that some of us are "short sleepers" or "long sleepers" because of our genes. Everyone has their own sleep needs, and it can change over time; the important thing is to feel rested during the day.

Sleep Problems

Getting a good night's sleep is often hard during cancer treatment and can pose a problem for life for some survivors. Dr. Zaharna notes that it's normal to wake up on occasion. If you feel well-rested and are not awake for long periods of time in the middle of the night, it probably isn't a problem.

Both trouble getting to sleep and waking up can be long-term side effects of treatment cancer treatment. For 23% of Pathways study respondents, their sleep was disturbed by pain, like the nerve problems reported by Linda and Sue in the Summer 2020 Pathways newsletter. Another 20% said they felt too hot; hot



flashes or night sweats may be caused by surgical or “normal” menopause, or by tamoxifen, a common hormonal therapy used after breast cancer. About 2% of participants told us their sleep was troubled by anxiety, worry or stress, without being asked!

Being tired during the day may be a sign that we aren’t sleeping well and we may not even know it. If you experience fatigue, and especially if you snore, you might want to talk to your doctor about sleep apnea. Sleep apnea is a common condition where you stop breathing for 10 seconds or longer during sleep. Find out more: <https://zbclink.org/KP-SleepApnea>

Stress is a common thing keeping people from getting to sleep or getting back to sleep. After being diagnosed with breast cancer, Therese had trouble getting to sleep because of anxiety. However, after treatment ended, she rated her sleep as pretty good.

Our immune systems ramp up to fight cancer and in response to treatments. And it doesn’t just shut off after treatment.

Ongoing inflammation sends a message to our brains that can disturb our energy, memory and thinking, mood, and sleep. For some, it could lead to insomnia, chronic trouble falling or staying asleep.



Martha was a great sleeper before her breast cancer diagnosis, and “I can honestly say there hasn’t been a night that I’ve slept uninterrupted since then.” She wakes up once or twice every night. Early on she had anxiety, and she does have a stressful role at work, yet she also wonders if it became a learned behavior or pattern and “once I woke up, my mind was on.”

Our body’s internal clock controls our circadian rhythms and keeps the body’s functions—including sleep—on schedule. The main “clock” is in the brain, controlling hormones, like melatonin, which makes us sleepy. Margarita is a ‘night owl’. She often doesn’t

get home from her Mexican folk dance classes until 11pm or midnight and goes to bed at 12 or 1am most nights. “On weekends it feels good to stay in bed,” she said, although “if I sleep too much, I also feel tired.”

For a time, after her cancer treatment, Margarita had trouble waking in the morning, sleeping through her alarm clock for 2–3 hours. Fortunately, the principal in her school allowed her to adjust her schedule.

Tips for Better Sleep

Light matters! Our body clock is directly linked to our eyes. Getting sunlight during the day and avoiding blue light (from phones, computers and tv screens) for an hour before sleep can keep your body clock on schedule. Sticking to a regular bedtime and wake-up time is also good for your body clock. Being physically active during the day helped Therese with her sleep during treatment and it helps now. If she doesn’t get enough sleep, she said “it affects not only my triathlon training, but my ability to function, overall.”

A dark, cool room helps with sleep. A face mask or black out curtains can block out light. If your bedroom isn’t quiet, try ear plugs or create white noise, either with a fan or a special machine that makes nature or other sounds. Avoid eating or drinking later at night. Almost half of Pathways members told us they had to get up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night. It is also useful to limit coffee, tea and other caffeinated drinks in the afternoon and evening.

If you have trouble getting to sleep, do something relaxing before bedtime. Therese started having trouble getting to sleep again last year. Now she has a nighttime ritual to help signal to her body that it is time to sleep, including writing about her day in a journal to “clear things out” of her mind and snuggling with her dog. And she uses the Calm app, provided free to KP members, to meditate almost every night.



Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi, or muscle relaxation. Take a warm bath. Play calming music or try reading. Change one thing at a time and keep a journal or notes to see what helps you sleep better.

For those who wake up, it may be enough to get up, go to bathroom, drink some water, and lay back down. If not, experts often recommend staying in bed no more than 15–20 minutes. If by then you can't sleep, try doing something quiet and calming.



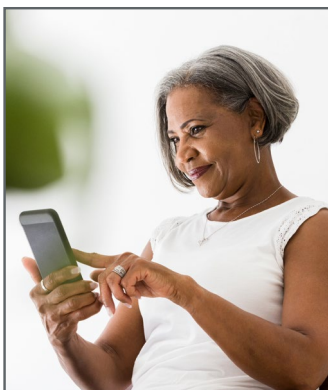
Martha tried many things over the years to quiet her mind and get back to sleep. Finally, in the past year, she found that sleep stories, also on the Calm app, work for her. “It forces your mind to concentrate on the story, and there's no room in the brain to think of other things.” Some nights she uses it twice and still gets a good night's sleep!

For Therese, it is rare to have trouble going back to sleep; when she does, she will do another meditation or read for a bit. For more tips check out [KP.org/Insomnia: Improving Your Sleep](https://kp.org/Insomnia:ImprovingYourSleep)

Resources

KP offers classes that can help with sleep problems. Check out what is offered near you on kp.org, like Improving Your Sleep, and Overcoming Insomnia. You might also try a KP yoga, tai chi, or meditation class. Or look for resources for a specific problem; for example, KP Oakland has a course to help manage chronic pain led by a psychologist and physical therapist.

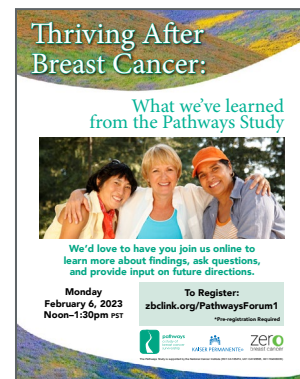
Don't forget that KP members have free access to self-care apps, like Calm and myStrength that can help us to improve sleep, manage depression, reduce stress, and more.



Talk with your healthcare provider if you might have sleep apnea. If you still have insomnia after trying these healthy sleep habits, ask your doctor about light therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). ❖

YOU ARE INVITED!

Please join us for the first Pathways Forum, a 90-minute online meeting about the Pathways Study and what we've learned about what we eat and Vitamin D, with Q&A. This webinar will take place Monday, February 6, 2023, from 12–1:30pm Pacific Time. Our researchers, collaborators and staff will be present as well as the Community Advisory Board members (which includes Pathways Study participants). You do not need to be a member of KP to join. This is a meeting for all continuing Pathways study participants and anyone who is interested, and we are very excited for this opportunity to get together with you. Go to this link to register: zbclink.org/PathwaysForum1 ❖



ONGOING STUDY FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS

During this 4th funding cycle, we continue to contact you to complete our now every other year follow-up surveys. These questionnaires take an average of 15 minutes to complete. Every survey question you answer makes our findings about surviving breast cancer and strengthens our knowledge about surviving breast cancer.

THANK YOU for your continued interest and participation! If you missed our call and would like to complete your survey, or if your contact information has changed, please call us at our toll-free number 1-866-206-2979 or email DOR-pathways@kp.org. ❖



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