The Oesophageal Patients Association
Caring for the cancer patient & their family

SLEEP

The amount of sleep we need varies for a number of reasons, including age, physical and emotional health, and lifestyle, the demands of work or social life and individual characteristics. As we get older it is normal to need less sleep and have more wakeful periods through the night.

However, many people with emotional worries and health problems find that they do not sleep well. Poor sleep won't affect your health – your body will still work properly, but it may make you feel tired, anxious and irritable and you may find it harder to concentrate.

Reasons for poor sleep include:

- Too much rest with not enough activity during the day
- Sleep during the day
- Tension when you are going to bed
- Breathlessness
- Caffeine (tea, coffee, fizzy drinks)
- Cigarettes
- Alcohol (it might help you to get to sleep but your sleep will not be as restful and you may wake more during the night)
- Worry or stress
- No regular routine for going to bed and getting up
- Being hungry or eating too soon before bed

What helps?

Think carefully about what may be making it harder for you to sleep. Try some of the suggestions below. Be patient – it is unlikely that these strategies will work straight away and you may feel you have tried them before. Have another go at them and don't give up before you have kept trying them for several weeks.

- Try to keep the same sleep pattern, so that you get used to going to bed and getting up a about the same time each day
- Resist the temptation to lie in or have a nap during the day after a bad night
- Take time to get relaxed before you go to bed, for example do some relaxation exercises, have a bath, listen to some relaxing music, have a milky drink
- Use your breathing exercises if you feel breathless before you go to bed
- Don't rush your bed time routine – pace yourself in the bathroom and getting undressed

- Make sure you are not too hot or too cold in bed
- Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol for several hours before bed time
- Don't eat or drink too much near to bedtime. Have your evening meal earlier and if necessary just have a light snack later on
- Worrying will keep you awake. Try using your breathing or relaxation exercises if you are worrying at night. Set aside some time every evening, at least an hour before bedtime, to write down your worries and how you will deal with this the next day. If you wake up in the night remind yourself that you have given these sometime already and that going over them now will help and that you can think about it the next day
- If you can't sleep don't lie in bed for hours. Get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy again and then go back to bed
- Don't watch TV in your bedroom – it will stimulate your mind and keep you awake and will stop your body associate the bedroom with sleep
- Get some exercise during the day. Pace yourself with this and leave plenty of time to wind down before you want to sleep

Remember:

- You will not be able to sleep well every night and you will have some sleepless nights – this is normal for everybody
- It will take time and practice for these methods to improve your sleep