**Email module 6**

CBT

+ Light

for Women

with Breast Cancer

This email is aimed to prepare you for sleeping well into the future,

even after you finish this six-week program.

**Preventing relapse: strategies for sleeping well into the future**

Over the past five weeks, we have covered a range of important techniques to help you better understand your sleep difficulties and cope with them as best as possible. We hope the knowledge and skills you have gained will continue to help you into the future. This module will cover some important strategies for continuing to manage your sleep.

It is quite common for women with breast cancer to continue experiencing sleep difficulties even once they have completed treatment. The following strategies will help you to maintain good sleep habits and minimize the chances of a relapse into insomnia.

**Go to bed only when sleepy**

Go to bed only when you are sleepy (that is, yawning, nodding off, struggling to keep your eyes open).  This is one of the most important rules for good sleep. Sleep is hard to come by when you are alert.  Following your body clock and riding the sleepiness wave when it comes will make it easier to fall asleep.

**Get up around the same time each morning**

Get up around the same time every morning, and try not to sleep in, even if you had a poor night’s sleep. Getting up at the same time each day will help your body maintain consistent daily rhythms. Of course it is not realistic to achieve a specific wake time every day, some weekends you might sleep in, you shouldn’t feel trapped by these guidelines! Just remember to get back to your routine after a night or two off, aim to have achieve your set wake time five nights of the week.

**What to do if your sleep problems return?**

It is normal to experience times of difficult sleep again, even if you feel that currently you are sleeping really well. Many things can trigger insomnia; the following steps are most important if your insomnia returns:

1. Remember not to compensate for a poor night’s sleep by extending time in bed the next day, this will only make it more difficult for you to sleep at night.
2. If you can’t sleep, don’t stay in bed. If you feel frustrated that you can’t sleep and are tossing and turning, get up and do something relaxing in another room, only return to bed when you feel sleepy.

Don’t forget about the benefits of sunlight, even after you have completed the intervention you can still achieve similar effects to light therapy by making time to be out in the sunlight each morning. Spending time outdoors by going for a morning walk will help you to feel less fatigued and improve your chances of falling asleep at night.

**Seek help if you need it**

Sometimes extra help is necessary to achieve good sleep. If you experience the following symptoms at least three nights a week, even when you use the sleep strategies that you have learnt, you might benefit from seeking professional help:

* Having trouble falling asleep and maintaining sleep, even when the opportunity for sleep is there.
* Not feeling refreshed after sleeping, feeling fatigued and sleepy during the day
* Your sleep difficulties cause you distress and impair your ability to function in your work or personal life, behaviourally or emotionally

If you are thinking about seeking help, speak to your treating team to get a referral to a psychological service. The following services offer psychological treatment for sleep disturbances and insomnia:

* Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Clinical Psychology Department

03 8559 5220

* Australasian Sleep Association directory for sleep services

https://www.sleep.org.au/servicesdirectory

**Reminders:**

30 minutes of bright light each morning and dim light in the evening keep your clock tuned.

Bright light during the day helps chase away sleepiness and fatigue.

When you feel worried or anxious, ask yourself if it is a solvable or an unsolvable problem.

Take action and problem-solve the solvable worries.

Worrying about unsolvable problems can make you feel worse. Those worries are simply “thoughts” your brain makes. Watch them come and go like ‘leaves on a stream’ or ‘clouds in the sky’ that we covered last week.