

Sleep and ALS

Getting a good night's sleep is very important, and it can be challenging for people living with ALS. There are strategies and devices that can help. Your ALS clinic or medical team can suggest what might work best for you. Sleeping better can improve your mood, energy level, and overall outlook on life.

Positioning and Pressure Relief

Getting comfortable in bed and repositioning yourself can be challenging. It is important to relieve pressure on specific parts of your body while sleeping. There are a number of strategies and devices that can help during different stages of the disease. Ask your ALS physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) what might work best for you.

Propping yourself up with pillows may help you breathe more easily. Bed wedges can help you sit up and/or raise your feet. If you have upper body strength but struggle to reposition yourself, you could use a bed rail or bed ladder to pull yourself into position.

Mattress overlays like an alternating pressure pad can help relieve pressure by mechanically inflating and deflating air pockets under you on an alternating pattern.

If you are more comfortable sleeping in your power wheelchair or lift chair recliner, discuss positioning and pressure relief options with your PT or OT. You may also want to consider getting a hospital bed, adjustable bed, or medical bed.

Breathing Challenges and Interventions

When your respiratory muscles begin to weaken, it becomes harder to breathe when lying down. If you are feeling fatigued, short of breath, or waking with morning headaches, talk with your ALS neurologist or respiratory therapist about respiratory devices that might help. Using a bilevel machine (BiPAP) or portable ventilator (noninvasively) can help you sleep better, have more energy, and wake feeling more rested.

Finding the Right Bed for You

If pillows and bed wedges are not providing enough support, you might benefit from a hospital bed, adjustable bed, or medical bed, all of which can help with positioning, circulation, and getting in and out of bed. Finding the right bed for your needs is a very individual decision. Discussing options with your PT, OT, and loved one can help you determine what will work best.



Getting In and Out of Bed

There are a variety of devices that can help you get in and out of bed. If you have upper body strength, a bed rail or transfer pole may help you get yourself up and into position to get out of bed. A bed ladder or bed foot support can help you sit up. Raising, lowering, and repositioning your hospital, adjustable, or medical bed can help you transfer in and out of your bed more easily. If your caregiver doesn't feel it is safe to move you, you will need to use a patient (Hoyer) lift.

Portable Toileting Options

If you are unable to get out of bed and walk safely to the bathroom at night, there are a variety of portable toileting devices that can help. A bedside commode is a portable toilet with a bucket that can be placed near your bed. There are portable urinal options for men and women as well as condom-catheters for men and external catheters for women. Adult diapers and bedpans are other options.

Developing an Alert System

While you are in bed, you must have a way to call for assistance. Develop a system that works for you and your caregiver. Ask your PT or OT which options might work best. For example, if you can use your hands, you can use a cell phone, wireless doorbell, or something as simple as a handbell. If you can speak but your caregiver might not hear you, you can use smart speakers with voice-activated assistants. You can also set up a call button or switch that can be activated by your hands, head, or feet.

Most devices that assist with sleeping—with the exception of semi-electric hospital beds—are not usually covered by insurance. However, you can ask your ALS clinic or local ALS Network care manager if they have any that you can borrow. You can also visit the ALS Equipment Guide to learn more and purchase devices.

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Formerly ALS Golden West

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