

Understanding and Managing Treatment-Related Fatigue

Fatigue is a daily lack of energy or an unusual feeling of whole-body tiredness that does not get better with simple rest or sleep. It is different from feeling tired which normally goes away after you sleep. Fatigue interferes with daily activities and can affect quality of life.

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of cancer and its treatments including surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Sometimes the exact cause of fatigue cannot be found, or fatigue may be related to one or more causes, including:

- Anemia—low level of red blood cells
- Decreased nutrition levels
- Dehydration due to fluid loss or poor fluid intake
- Depression or anxiety
- Hormone levels that are too high or too low
- Lack of exercise
- Medications to treat pain or nausea
- Pain
- Stress
- Other medical problems such as heart, lung, kidney, or nerve problems

To feel better, do the following:

- Manage your activity level to save your energy.
 - Pace yourself and do tasks when you have the most energy.
 - Take time to rest in between times when you are more active.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
 - Drink at least 8-10 cups/day or as recommended by your doctor.
 - Fluids can include water, sports drink, broth, weak decaffeinated teas, clear juices, and gelatin.
- Maintain good nutrition.
 - Eat 5 or 6 snacks or small meals during the day instead of 3 big meals.
 - Eat plenty of protein including milk, yogurt, eggs, lean meats, fish, and poultry.
 - Ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a dietitian who can advise you on how many calories you need and provide suggestions.

- Regular, moderate exercise is one of the best ways to reduce fatigue.
 - Moderate exercise is anything that gets your heart beating faster.
 - Regular means every day, or at least every other day.
 - Even during cancer treatment, it is safe to continue regular physical activity.
 - Exercise may include things like walking, riding a bike, swimming, water aerobics, pushing a lawn mower, or gardening unless your healthcare provider has instructed otherwise.
 - Most importantly, move your whole body for periods that you can tolerate. Even doing laundry or walking to the mailbox may be exercise.
 - Get 150 minutes of moderate activity a week, or exercising for a total of 20 to 30 minutes a day. It does not need to be done all at one time.
 - The type and amount of your physical activity may change during and after cancer treatment.
 - Talk to your care team about your current activity level and types of exercise best for you.

What can you do to lower stress?

- Aromatherapy
- Massage
- Music therapy
- Yoga

Talk to your doctor before trying any new medications, over-the-counter products, herbal products, or supplements for your fatigue.

Call your care team if you have:

- Fatigue that keeps you from being able to care for yourself
- Shortness of breath with very little activity
- Pain that you cannot control or does not go away
- Difficulty controlling side effects of your treatment, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or loss of appetite
- Ongoing or new depression or anxiety

Notes

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PES-301