

If you have any questions, please talk with your physician or nurse.

How to Manage Fatigue During Cancer Treatment

Fatigue means feeling tired, exhausted or not having the energy to do your daily activities. Fatigue is a very common side effect of cancer treatments, which include chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy and radiation therapy.

- Many people feel very tired or exhausted during their treatment.
- The amount of fatigue you have may vary depending on where you are in your treatment cycle. This can be different for every patient.
- Having fatigue does not mean your treatment is not working or that your illness is getting worse.

Here are some helpful tips to lessen fatigue and increase your energy level.

Keep moving

Exercise is the best way to fight your fatigue. Exercise for 15 to 30 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week. Start out slowly and increase your pace over time.

Good exercises for fatigue are:

- Walking
- Biking
- Yoga
- Chair exercises
- Light aerobic or water exercises

Eat well

Remember that food is fuel. Make sure you continue eating well during your treatment. Your sense of taste may change during your treatment. Be open to trying new foods, and keep a variety of foods on hand. To improve the taste of food, flavor foods with seasonings, herbs and/or spices. It may also help to eat small, frequent meals and healthy snacks 6 to 8 times a day.

Be sure to:

- Drink lots of liquids (at least 8 glasses a day) to stay hydrated.
- Eat foods high in protein and calories, such as fish, chicken, turkey, avocados, eggs and nuts.

Follow these tips to save time:

- Plan your menu in advance.
- Prepare detailed shopping lists.
- Prepare your meals when you are feeling well.
- Make extra food and freeze or refrigerate it.

Increase your enjoyment at mealtime by trying to:

- Eat in a relaxed and pleasant place.
- Plan your day so you are not overly tired just before meals.

If you are having trouble taking in enough calories, ask a member of your healthcare team about meeting with a dietitian. The dietitian can work with you to make sure you are getting the calories and nutrients you need.

Rest

Make a plan to rest:

- Set a bedtime and a wake-up time.
- Try to limit yourself to 1 nap that is 20 to 30 minutes long, and avoid naps within 4 hours of your bedtime.
- Do not eat heavy meals or drink a large amount of liquid before bedtime.
- Follow a relaxing bedtime routine starting 1 to 2 hours before bedtime. This will help you set aside problems or concerns that may keep you awake.

Set the stage to help you sleep:

- Turn on a night light.
- Use your bed and bedroom for sleeping and intimate activity only.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and comfortable.

Do not lie awake in bed for a long period of time. If you cannot sleep, leave your bedroom and do something to help you relax until you feel sleepy again.

Conserve your energy

- Let other people help you.
- Plan short rest breaks in your workday.
- Spread household tasks throughout the week.
- Wear shirts with front buttons instead of pullover shirts.
- Prepare double portions when cooking and freeze the extra food.
- Wear comfortable clothes and low-heeled, slip-on shoes.
- Choose the tasks that are most important to you and perform them when you feel best.
- Sit down as much as possible when doing tasks such as cooking, bathing, drying off, washing dishes and ironing.

Other guidelines

- Never take any supplements to help with fatigue without first talking with your physician. Supplements may interact with your treatment and possibly make it less effective. Supplements may also interfere with your treatment in a harmful way.
- Anxiety and depression can contribute to fatigue. If you have anxiety or depression, talk with your physician about supportive care options to help you with these symptoms.
- Work together with your healthcare team to lessen your fatigue. This may help you tolerate your treatment better and may improve your quality of life.

When to call your physician

Call your physician if you have any of these symptoms:

- Confusion
- Fatigue that worsens
- Feeling too tired and weak to get out of bed for 24 hours or more

Fatigue can be caused by anemia (low red blood cells) or hormone changes. These problems can be treated. Your physician may order blood tests to see if your fatigue is caused by these problems.