

Patient Care Services
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Cancer Treatment-Related Fatigue Patient Education

Cancer Treatment - Related Fatigue

A feeling of tiredness, often more severe than the tiredness healthy people experience. It is seen in people who have surgery, radiation treatment, chemotherapy, or other forms of cancer treatment.

How do people describe cancer treatment - related fatigue?

Individuals with cancer have described fatigue as weariness; exhaustion; tiredness; a lack of energy; sleepiness; drowsiness; confusion; impatience. Others have described fatigue as “just do not feel like myself” and feeling “drained after activities” like cooking a meal or taking a shower. Other words used to describe cancer treatment-related fatigue are weary; worn-out; pooped; low blood; listlessness; no pep; no energy; a strong desire to stop and rest; a strong desire to lie down or sleep.

What happens when you experience cancer treatment - related fatigue?

Fatigue can affect the way you think as well as how you feel. You may need more sleep. You may have trouble paying attention when reading, watching television, even talking with your family members. You may find that you are not able to do all the activities you did before cancer treatment.

What causes cancer treatment - related fatigue?

The cause of cancer treatment - related fatigue is not fully known. Problems like low blood count, sleep disruption, stress, not eating enough, along with other factors, may contribute to fatigue. Fatigue may also be due to new medical problems (hypothyroidism, depression, etc.).

How do other people cope with cancer treatment - related fatigue?

Everyone experiences fatigue and treatment differently. You may not feel tired while someone else does or your fatigue may not last as long as someone else's does.

Tips to help you cope with fatigue:

- Plan your day so that you have time to rest.
- Take short naps or breaks, rather than one long rest period.
- Eat as well as you can and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take short walks or do light exercise if possible. You may find this helps with fatigue.
- Try easier or shorter versions of activities you enjoy.
- Try activities that are less strenuous, like listening to music or reading.
- Keep a diary of how you feel each day. This will help you plan your daily activities.
- Join a support group. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue. You can learn coping hints from talking about your situation. Your nurse or social worker can put you in touch with a support group in your area.
- Save your energy for the most important things.

- Become comfortable having others do some things that you usually do.
- See what helps you feel less tired and make those activities a priority for you.

When is rest not the best treatment for cancer treatment - related fatigue?

You may be advised to "take it easy" and "get plenty of rest". Sometimes staying in bed over a long time can slow your body down and cause you to feel even more tired.

What can family or significant others do to help with cancer treatment - related fatigue?

Do not push yourself to do more than you can do. Ask your family or friends to help you with tasks you find difficult or taxing, like mowing the lawn or grocery shopping. It may be difficult for family members to understand that rest does not always make your fatigue get better or go away. Explaining that the fatigue you feel is different from the fatigue you had before treatment may help them understand and it will take time for the fatigue to get better.

What symptoms should you report to the nurse or doctor?

Call your nurse or doctor if you:

- Get dizzy.
- Feel a loss of balance when walking.
- Feel a loss of balance when getting out of bed or getting out of a chair.
- Fall or hurt yourself.
- Have a problem waking up.
- Have a problem catching your breath.
- Have a sudden increase in fatigue.

Who can I call to get more information?

Contact your oncology nurse or doctor.