

Cancer-Related Fatigue

What is cancer-related fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue is a common feeling for cancer patients. It is not the same as the fatigue caused by the demands of daily living. It can keep you from enjoying life and your daily routine. Patients have described it as:

- Feeling tired
- Feeling tired
- Feeling exhausted
- Feeling worn out
- Heaviness in their body
- Feeling slow
- Having trouble concentrating
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling moody
- Feeling sad

What causes cancer-related fatigue?

The exact cause is unknown. Some of things that might lead to feeling fatigued are:

- The cancer itself
- Medicines, such as chemotherapy
- Radiation
- Low blood counts
- Poor nutrition
- Sleep problems
- Depression, fear, worry or anxiety
- Lack of activity

How can I manage my cancer-related fatigue?

Talk to your provider about your fatigue. They can help you find ways to make you feel better.

Eat and drink. Eating and drinking enough will also help you feel less fatigued. We know that your disease and treatment may make it hard to eat and drink enough. Try eating many small meals and taking sips of fluids throughout the day rather than eating

a few larger meals each day. Ask your provider if you can talk to a dietician. They can suggest ways to help you get enough to eat and drink enough.

Be active. We know that exercise can help you feel less tired and improve your sleep. It can also improve your mood. Try going for a short walk. Plan to be active when you have the most energy.

Don't do too much. You may not have enough energy to do everything you want to do in a day. While you have energy, do the things you want to do and ask someone to help you with the others (such as, cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking meals). Know your limits and don't be too hard on yourself.

Rest and relax. Save energy and only do the things that need to do. If you feel tired and want to take a nap, you should limit your nap to 10-15 minutes. Longer naps can make it hard to sleep at night. Relaxation methods may allow your body to rest while helping to decrease your stress. Try meditation, prayer, guided imagery or visualization to relax.

Sleep at night. Some people have trouble sleeping. Have good sleep habits. Go to bed at the same time each night, limit caffeine, be active during the day, use your bed only for sleeping and limit naps.

Find support. Cognitive therapy, relaxation, counseling, support groups, social groups, keeping a journal, hypnosis, and biofeedback may help you manage your fatigue. Talk with your provider if you want to learn more.

Take medicines. Medicines may help ease fatigue. This may not be an option for all. Your provider will let you know if there is a medicine that may help you.

References

1. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (2020). *Patient and Caregiver Resources: Fatigue*. Retrieved from https://www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life_with_cancer/managing_symptoms/fatigue.aspx
2. National Cancer Institute (2018). *Support for People with Cancer: Chemotherapy and You*.

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