

Managing Treatment-Related Fatigue

Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most common side effects of treatment. It usually comes on suddenly and is not relieved by rest or sleep. Fatigue is usually experienced a few days following treatment and can last from one to six months.

There are a variety of symptoms you might experience:

- Low energy level and the need to rest after normal physical activity
- Overall weakness
- Difficulty completing daily activities
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly

Your fatigue might be caused by:

- Anemia resulting from chemotherapy
- Combination therapy – either having more than one treatment at the same time or having one type of treatment after another
- Dehydration
- Unrelieved pain
- Lack of exercise
- Side effects of some medications
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety
- Not eating well
- Depression



Tips for managing fatigue:

- Conserve energy by planning ahead and organizing your work, pacing yourself, and scheduling rest breaks. Schedule important activities earlier in the day when you're likely to have more energy.
- Exercise daily. Exercise will help boost energy levels and reduce the risk of deconditioning or becoming weaker from being sedentary. If you are able, try walking for 30 minutes a day and doing some light weightlifting. Regular exercise improves circulation and has been shown to reduce the risk of several types of cancer.
- Eat a balanced diet. Healthy foods provide energy and important nutrients to keep you strong.
- Stay well-hydrated. Even mild dehydration can make you feel tired or dizzy. Start the morning with a glass of water when you first get out of bed.
- Maintain a normal sleep routine – too much or too little sleep can cause fatigue. Limit daytime naps to 30 minutes twice a day. Set a consistent time to lie down and get up.
- If you are having difficulty sleeping, try relaxing before bedtime – take a hot bath, listen to calming music, read, pray, meditate, or use guided imagery. Dim lights an hour before bedtime, especially blue light sources such as TV, computer, and phone screens. This will help promote the production of melatonin, your body's natural sleep hormone.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine acts as a stimulant and alcohol as a depressant; both can interfere with chemicals regulating your sleep cycles and contribute to poor rest quality.
- Manage stress: Adjust your expectations; pare your list of "to do" items down to one or two per day. Let friends and family assist you. Join a cancer support group; they are a great place to meet people who can understand what you are experiencing and give you helpful, practical support.
- Don't hesitate to discuss your symptoms with your medical providers.

