

# Feeling tired (fatigue) during cancer treatment

Fatigue means feeling very tired or having no energy. It is common during cancer treatment.

## Who gets fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is the most common symptom felt by cancer patients. It is the feeling of being physically, mentally and emotionally tired. It can happen any time during treatment with chemotherapy, radiation therapy or targeted therapies and can continue after treatment ends.

Everyone gets tired sometimes, but with CRF, this can be much worse than usual. It does not come on because of recent activity. You may still feel tired after having a sleep or rest.

Fatigue is usually caused by your treatment but can sometimes be caused by cancer or other health problems.

Having fatigue:

- does not mean that your cancer is getting worse
- does not mean that the treatment is not working
- is normal during cancer treatment.

## Getting support

It is important to talk about fatigue with your cancer care team. They will check for any causes that can be treated and look at any medicines you are taking. They may also do a check-up and some blood tests.

At your next visit, tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- are spending most of the time in bed
- are having trouble concentrating
- have trouble sleeping
- feel tired all the time
- can't do your normal daily activities
- feel anxious or depressed.

## Common questions

### What causes fatigue?

Fatigue during cancer treatment may have more than one cause. It can be caused or made worse by:

- your cancer
- your treatment – surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy or targeted therapies
- low red blood cells (anaemia)
- some medicines
- some other illnesses
- pain
- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (throwing up)
- trouble sleeping or not getting enough sleep
- depression or anxiety
- not eating and drinking well or enough.

### Does fatigue get better?

Fatigue usually improves after treatment but it can last for months or years after treatment for some people.

## Get help if you have any fatigue symptoms

Contact your doctor or nurse immediately if you have:

- a temperature of 38°C or higher
- struggled to eat for more than five days
- struggled to drink fluids for more than 24 hours
- been too tired to get out of bed for more than 24 hours
- difficulties chewing or swallowing
- become confused
- difficulty sleeping at night
- feeling breathless, dizzy or have heart palpitations after only mild activity.

If you can't contact your doctor or nurse, go to your nearest hospital emergency department for help.

## Tips to manage fatigue

### Pace yourself

- Make a manageable to-do list for your day.
- Decide what is most important for that day and what can wait.
- Do the things that are important to you when you don't feel so tired.
- Ask family and friends to help you with jobs around the house.
- If you can, try to do less hours at work or get help from your workmates.

### Get a good night's sleep

- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day.
- Do something that relaxes you before bed like having a bath, reading a book or listening to music.
- Don't use computers or smart phones just before bed.
- Avoid caffeine, sugary food and drinks in the late afternoon or evening.
- Don't drink alcohol to help you sleep.

### Rest during the day

- If you feel tired in the daytime, have a nap.
- Keep daytime naps short – no more than one hour.
- Don't nap close to bedtime.

### Eat and drink well

- Eat a healthy diet including vegetables and fruit.
- Try eating small meals regularly to keep your energy levels up.
- Drink enough water or fluid every day (8 cups unless you are on a fluid restricted diet).

**If you are feeling too tired, do not drive. If you have to drive, plan your trip for when you know you usually feel more alert and take regular breaks.**

### Be physically active

- Being active helps many people to manage fatigue.
- Talk to your doctor about the right exercise plan for you.
- Your doctor can refer you to an exercise professional who can help make an exercise plan just for you.

### Try relaxation techniques

- Different relaxation techniques work for different people. Some people find that meditation, prayer or yoga can help.
- Other people relax by doing activities that they enjoy, like reading, listening to music, painting or spending time with family and friends.

### Things to ask your healthcare team:

- Will I get fatigue during my treatment?
- What can I do to manage fatigue?
- When should I call for help or advice?
- Who should I contact?
- How should I contact them (including at night or weekends)?
- Can I see a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist to help me with an exercise plan?



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