

# ***Hints to Help with Cancer-Related Fatigue***

The following information has been developed to give you some hints on coping with your fatigue. Your nurse or doctor will review this information with you and answer any questions that you may have.

## ***What is cancer-related fatigue?***

Cancer-related fatigue is a feeling of tiredness, often much worse than the tiredness healthy people feel. It may not go away with sleep and can occur when you are not doing anything. It can appear suddenly and is often overwhelming.

It may be physical, emotional and/or mental exhaustion. Your body, especially your arms and legs, may feel heavy. You may have less of a desire to do normal activities, like eating or shopping. You may also find it hard to concentrate or think clearly. Some words often used to describe fatigue include weakness, a lack of energy, sleepiness, drowsiness, confusion, and impatience. Some have described fatigue as ‘I don’t feel like myself’ or feeling drained after activities like cooking or bathing. Other words used to describe fatigue include worn-out, pooped, low blood, low energy with a strong desire to stop and rest or lie down and sleep.

## ***Causes of fatigue***

- Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of cancer treatment. Problems like sleep disruption, stress, not eating or drinking enough may make fatigue worse. Treatments such as surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or other forms of cancer treatment and their side effects can add to fatigue.
- Patients who have nausea and vomiting may not eat enough to keep up their energy levels. Anemia, a low blood count of red blood cells, is another common side effect of cancer treatment that is known to cause fatigue. Your doctor will check your blood counts and may order treatment if the counts are low.
- Emotional stress, coping with anxiety, conflict, sadness, traveling to and from treatments and even tension among loved ones require extra energy, which can add to the feeling of fatigue. Changes in your routine such as sleeping, eating, and working patterns may change and affect your level of energy.

## ***To help avoid or lessen fatigue***

Side effects from treatment, such as fatigue, vary among persons with cancer. Here are some tips to help you cope with fatigue:

- Plan rest breaks into your day. Take short naps or breaks, rather than one, long rest period. Don’t overdo it with rest and sleep. Too much rest can decrease your energy level.
- Eat as well as you can.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

- 
- Pace yourself and stay as active as you can. Do regular light exercise such as short walks if possible.
  - Try easier and shorter versions of activities you enjoy.
  - Try less strenuous activities such as listening to music or reading.
  - Keep a diary of how you feel each day. This can help you plan your daily activities.
  - Share your feelings with others such as in a support group. This can help ease the burden of fatigue and can help you learn hints from talking about your situation.
  - Save your energy for the most important things. Spread your activities throughout the day. Do not force yourself to do more than you can manage.
  - Store items you will use a lot within easy reach and close by to reduce trips.
  - Allow others to do some things that you usually do. Mowing the lawn, food shopping, helping with meals, and running errands are good examples.
  - Become aware of what helps you to feel less tired and make those activities a priority for you.
  - Use proper body mechanics. When sitting, use well-supporting chairs; adjust work heights when possible to avoid bending over; bend at hips and knees, not at back; and carry several smaller loads or use a cart.
  - Limit overhead work by using long handled tools, storing items lower, and asking for help.
  - Avoid extremes of temperature, smoke or noxious fumes, and long, hot showers or baths.
  - Wear a terry cloth bathrobe to dry off after bathing instead of a towel.
  - Learn techniques to help you relax.

***Call your nurse or doctor if you***

- Get dizzy
- Feel a loss of balance when walking or getting out of bed or up from a chair
- Fall or hurt yourself
- Have a problem waking up
- Have a problem catching your breath
- Have a sudden increase in fatigue
- Have been too tired to get out of bed for the past 24 hours
- Feel confused or cannot think clearly
- Feel your fatigue has worsened

