



## Fatigue

People getting cancer treatment very often feel very tired. This tiredness is called fatigue. It's not the same as being tired at the end of a hard day. It may not get better with rest or sleep. It can last for months after treatment ends. This kind of fatigue is when your body and even your mind feel very tired. People may say they are tired, weak, exhausted, weary, or worn out. Fatigue may start slowly or appear quickly. It can feel overwhelming.

Fatigue can affect many parts of your life, such as how well you can eat, how you feel about yourself, and how well you can take care of yourself. It can make it hard to focus. It may cause problems with how you relate to others. Most people getting cancer treatment say that fatigue is more stressful than nausea, vomiting, or pain. For some, fatigue is the main reason they stop treatment. Fatigue should not be ignored.

### What causes fatigue?

Fatigue is different for every person. Here are some causes of fatigue:

Chemotherapy	Pain	Sleep problems
Radiation	Certain medicines	Lack of exercise
Surgery	Not drinking enough fluids	Not being able to get out of bed
Nausea	Eating problems	Feeling anxious
Vomiting	Infection	Being depressed
Treatment side effects	Low blood counts (anemia)	Emotional demands of cancer

Sometimes it's hard to know just what causes fatigue. It's a common side effect of most cancer treatments. It can even be caused by the cancer itself. It can be very hard to treat because other things can add to the fatigue, such as feeling sad, depressed, or anxious. Only you know if you have fatigue and how bad it is. No lab tests or x-rays can show your level of fatigue. The best measure of fatigue comes from what you report to your health care team.

### What are clues you have fatigue?

- Having no energy

- Sleeping more
- Not wanting to do the things you normally want to do
- Feeling tired even after sleeping
- Being unable to focus or think clearly
- Feeling sad, negative, or irritable

## **How can you cope with fatigue?**

- Tell your doctor or nurse about your fatigue. Let them know how bad it is. Your doctor will want to look for the cause of the fatigue. Some causes can be treated.
- Plan your day so that you have time to rest. A few short rest periods may be better than one long one. Naps can be helpful as long as they don't cause trouble sleeping at night.
- Do the most important things when you have the most energy. Accept that less important things may not get done.
- Ask loved ones and friends for help.
- Put things that you use often close by.
- Learn ways to deal with your stress. Try deep-breathing exercises, reading, playing music, or other things that you like to do.
- Talk to your doctor and get help with any pain, nausea, or depression you may have.
- Be active if you can. Ask your doctor about the best type of exercise for you.
- Keep a record of how you feel each day. Take it with you when you see your doctor.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes protein (meat, eggs, milk, and beans). Drink plenty of fluids. Ask your doctor if you should follow a special diet or take vitamins.

### **Call your doctor if:**

- Your fatigue does not get better, keeps coming back, or gets worse.
- You are more tired than usual during or after doing things.
- You're feeling tired and it's not because you were more active than usual.
- Your fatigue disrupts your social life or daily routines.
- Your fatigue doesn't get better if you rest or sleep.
- You get confused or can't focus your thoughts.
- You feel out of breath or your heart is racing after just a little activity.
- You can't get out of bed for more than 24 hours.

## Questions to ask your doctor:

- Why do I feel so tired?
- Is the cancer or cancer treatment making me feel this tired?
- Are there any treatments to help my fatigue?
- What are my blood counts? Are they low? Can this be treated?
- Are there foods that I should eat to help build up my blood?

Though fatigue can be tough to deal with, it can be managed. If you need help with fatigue or have questions, please call us anytime, day or night, at **1-800-227-2345**.

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For additional assistance please contact your American Cancer Society  
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