

MANAGING

Fatigue

What is fatigue?

- A very strong sense of exhaustion physically, mentally and emotionally
- Caused by cancer or cancer treatment
- Can last over time and interfere with usual activities
- Differs from the tiredness of everyday life, which is usually temporary and relieved by rest
- More distressing and not always relieved by rest
- Can vary in its unpleasantness and severity
- Can make being with friends and family difficult
- Can make it difficult to follow your treatment plan

Common causes of cancer-related fatigue:

- Anemia (low red blood cell count)
- Pain
- Emotional distress
- Sleep problems
- Poor nutrition
- Lack of exercise
- Side effect of medication or cancer treatment
- Other illnesses such as infection, hypertension, diabetes

Common words used to describe cancer-related fatigue:

- Feeling tired, weak, exhausted, weary, worn out
- Having no energy, not being able to concentrate
- Feelings of heaviness in arms and legs, feeling little to no motivation, sadness and/or irritability and unable to sleep or sleeping too much

What to tell your doctor:

- When did the fatigue start?
- Has it gotten worse over the course of your treatment?
- What makes your fatigue better?
- What makes your fatigue worse?
- How has the fatigue affected your daily activities?

Energy-saving principles:

- Try to do your most important activities first.
- Ask for help with tasks when you can.
- Place items you use often within easy reach.
- Set up a structured routine.
- Balance rest and activities.
- Plan activities during times of higher energy.
- Set up a regular bedtime.
- When you can, sit instead of stand while doing tasks.

Principles of exercise:

- Your heart, lungs and muscles need a daily workout. When you are less active, especially while in bed, your heart, lungs and muscles have very little work to do. Over time, your heart pumps less forcefully, your lungs expand less fully and your muscles will become weak and tight. This causes a drop in your energy level, which makes it harder to carry out your daily routine.

The following tips should be considered:

- Check with your doctor before exercising.
- If you were given exercises:
 - Do exercises slowly and completely.
 - If too tired to finish exercises, do what you can.
 - Always work at your own pace, do not rush.
 - Work within your own target heart rate (ask your doctor for details).
 - Remember to breathe while you exercise.
- Walk!