

# Fatigue: What it is and Ways to Manage

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## What it is and why it happens

Fatigue, also called tiredness, from cancer treatment can range from a mild to extreme feeling of being tired. Many people describe fatigue as feeling weak, worn out, heavy or slow. Resting does not always help. Fatigue can happen all at once or little by little. People feel fatigue in different ways. You may feel more or less fatigue than someone else who gets the same treatment. If you receive radiation therapy along with chemo your fatigue may be more severe.

Fatigue can happen during treatment and even for weeks or months after it is over. Fatigue can be caused by the type of treatment, the effort of making frequent visits to the doctor, or feelings such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Fatigue can also be caused by:

- Low red blood cell count
- Pain
- Medications
- Appetite loss
- Trouble sleeping
- Lack of activity
- Trouble breathing
- Infection
- Doing too much at one time
- Other medical problems

## What you can do to manage fatigue

- **Be active.** Exercise is the best way to lessen fatigue. Ask your cancer doctor if it's safe for you to exercise during your treatment. Even 15 or 30 minutes of exercise a day, like walking or gentle stretching, can help give you energy. Avoid things that could lead to a fall. To learn more, ask for our handout, **Exercise During and After Cancer Treatment**, or call 216-844-5432 to have a copy sent to you.



- **Eat and drink well.** Try to eat 5 to 6 small meals and snacks rather than 3 large meals. Keep foods around that are easy to fix, such as canned soups and frozen meals. Drink 6 to 8 (eight ounce) cups of liquids each day, unless a member of your cancer care team tells you otherwise. If you need help with food and drink choices, you can ask to meet with a dietitian.



## More ways you can manage fatigue

- **Plan time to rest.** Alternate between activity and rest. Plan ahead. Rushing uses energy. Limit naps to 30 minutes. Keeping naps short helps you sleep better at night.



- **Keep items you use often within reach.** Don't stand for too long. If needed, use devices such as a reaching or grabbing tool, bedside commode or shower chair.
- **Do things to help you relax.** Lowering stress may give you more energy. You might want to try meditation, prayer, yoga, guided imagery or visualization.

- **Promote good sleep.** You are likely to sleep better at night when you are active during the day. You may also find it helpful to relax before going to bed.



Avoid alcohol and high sugar foods in the evening and caffeine 6 to 8 hours before it bed since they may keep you awake. Wake up and go to bed at the same time each day. Avoid cell phone and computer use late at night. Stop smoking.

- **Plan a work schedule that works for you.** You may want to talk with your boss about ways to work from home. Or you may want to go on medical leave (stop working for a while) while getting cancer treatment.
- **Let family and friends help.** They can help with household chores, provide rides, shop for food and cook meals.
- **Learn from others who have cancer.** People who have cancer can help by sharing ways that they manage fatigue. One way to meet others is by joining a support group – either in person or online.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse.** Let them know if fatigue is keeping you from doing your normal activities. If you need help coping with difficult thoughts or feelings, or problems like pain, they may suggest you meet with a counselor or specialist.

## Call your cancer doctor's office right away if you have:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher or chills
- Fatigue that is so bad that you cannot do your normal activities like getting dressed, taking a shower or making meals
- Dizziness or loss of balance when walking or getting out of a bed or chair
- Confusion
- Weight loss



## Go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911 right away if you have:

- Problems breathing
- Problems walking
- Fainting - passing out or unable to wake up
- Fallen and hurt yourself



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This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.