

Fatigue: Feeling Tired or Worn Out

Fatigue is common during cancer treatment

If you feel tired and weak, even after a good night's sleep, you're not alone. Fatigue is the most common side effect for both cancer patients and the people who care for them. It can make it hard to do things you want to do, and lead to feeling frustrated.



Fatigue can be physical, mental, or both

- With *physical fatigue*, your body feels worn out. You have no energy left to do one more thing.
- With *mental fatigue*, feelings of stress and worry pile up. It may be hard to focus on tasks or remember things. You may have a short temper.

These problems can cause fatigue for both patients and caregivers.

What causes fatigue?

- *The disease and treatments.* Fatigue is a very common side effect of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation. In addition, the disease and the treatments can cause pain and low red blood cells, which can lead to fatigue.
- *Worry or depression.* If you have cancer, it's likely you feel worried and anxious. These feelings can tire you out. If

these feelings are very strong, be sure to ask your health care team for help.

- *Poor health habits.* Your health care team has most likely advised you to eat healthy foods, get plenty of sleep and rest, and be as active as you can every day. These health habits will help you cope with your treatments and with fatigue. If you're not sure what's right for you, ask your doctor or nurse for help.

How can I manage fatigue to feel better?

- *Conserve your energy.*
 - Plan your day. Do the most important things when your energy is highest.
 - Sit whenever you can.
 - Pace yourself. Break up tasks into smaller parts and tackle one thing at a time.
 - Don't fight the fatigue. Listen to your body and take a break when you need one.

Fatigue: Feeling Tired or Worn Out

— Ask family and friends for help with meals, yard work, housework, driving, and errands.

- *Restore your energy.*

— Schedule time for fun. Do things you enjoy that are relaxing.

— Use nature as a way to help your mind relax and to regain your energy. Try things such as looking at trees, flowers, or birds. Visit a park and enjoy the scenery. Try to do these activities for at least 30 minutes 3 times a week

— Read a book, meditate, listen to music, or enjoy a hobby.

- *Be active.* Regular exercise will boost your energy and lower stress.

— Walk for 10-15 minutes each day, more if you can.

— If it's hard to leave the house, use a gentle exercise DVD.

— Try yoga, biking, or other activities, if your doctor says it's OK.

- *Plan time to rest.*

— Create a bedtime routine that helps you fall asleep and stay asleep. Get to bed at the same time each night, even on weekends. Relax before bedtime by reading, bathing, or listening to quiet music. Get up at about the same time each morning.

— If you drink coffee, tea, or soda with caffeine, drink them just in the morning. Don't use them in the afternoon or evening because they might keep you awake.

— If you drink alcohol, know your limit and don't drink in the 3 hours before



bedtime. Drinking at bedtime can cause waking up in the middle of the night.

— If you nap during the day (its OK to nap!), set a one hour limit. Then, do something active.

- *Eat healthy. Drink lots of water.*

— Healthy eating usually includes 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables each day. It also includes low fat meat or protein, whole grains, and low fat dairy products. If you have trouble eating due to your treatments or you're not sure what to do, ask your health care team for help.

Fatigue: Feeling Tired or Worn Out

- Try eating 5 or 6 small meals spaced out over the day instead of 3 large meals. This will help keep up your strength.
- Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of water each day. Drinking enough water helps to prevent feelings of fatigue. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much you can drink.

- *Distract yourself.*
 - Watch a movie. Light-hearted or funny movies can lift your spirits.
 - Visit with friends and family. Limit the length of visits to what your energy allows.

What questions should I ask my doctor or nurse?

- What foods and drinks are best for me?
- How much water should I drink each day?
- What exercise is OK for me?

When should I get help?

Be sure to ask for help when you:

- *Feel very tired or worn out* and can't seem to get over it.
- *Are short of breath or feel dizzy*
- *Have a red blood count that is low, or your body needs more liquids.*

- *Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.*

Your doctor may prescribe medicine to help short-term.

- *Feel depressed.* You may need medical treatment.

Take good and gentle care of yourself to limit fatigue.

Do what you can to limit fatigue and plan around it. Ask for help when you need it. Make the most of every day.



This information was developed in response to Michigan's Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan, under guidance of the Prostate Prostate Cancer Action Committee. Their efforts were supported in part by the University of Michigan School of Nursing and the Michigan Department of Community Health with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Cooperative Agreement 5U58DP000812. The contents of the publication do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

This fact sheet contains general information and is not meant to replace consultation with your doctor or nurse.

Developed September 2009.