

What to Do for Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness and lack of energy. People with cancer-related fatigue often say they are exhausted, even when they get enough sleep. Cancer-related fatigue can be worse than fatigue from daily life, and it doesn't get better with rest.



What causes fatigue in people with cancer?

Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most common side effects of cancer and its treatment. Some common causes of fatigue in people with cancer are:

- Chemotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Surgery
- Immunotherapy
- Low red blood cell counts (anemia)
- Pain
- Anxiety or depression



What does fatigue feel like?

People describe fatigue in many ways. Some say they feel tired, weak, exhausted, weary, worn out, or slow. They may say they have no energy and can't focus. Some also talk about their arms and legs feeling heavy, not wanting to do anything, and not being able to sleep or sleeping too much. They may say they feel moody, sad, irritable, or frustrated.

Your cancer care team may ask you to rate your fatigue as none, mild, moderate, or severe. Or you can use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means no fatigue at all, and 10 means the worst fatigue you can imagine.

You may be asked questions like:

- When did the fatigue start? How long has it lasted?
- Has it changed over time? In what way?
- What makes it better? Worse?
- How has it affected what you do every day or the things that bring meaning to your life?



How is fatigue treated?

How your cancer care team treats your fatigue will depend on the cause and symptoms. Common treatments for fatigue include:

- Medicines to make you feel more alert and awake
- Physical therapy
- Counseling and stress management
- Sleep therapy



What can you do to manage fatigue?

Be as active as you can.

- Try to get some physical activity each day. Even short walks can ease fatigue and help you feel better. Check with your cancer care team before starting to exercise. They may suggest that you work with a physical therapist to learn the best exercise plan for you.
- Follow a daily routine, keeping as normal a level of activity as you can.
- Other types of activity, such as yoga, tai chi, or stretching, may also help ease fatigue.

Save your energy.

- Decide which things you most need or want to do and focus on those first.
- Put things that you use most often within easy reach.
- Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. Their support might help you cope better with your fatigue.

Lower your stress.

- Yoga, massage therapy, meditation, and relaxation exercises can help lower stress levels.
- Ask your cancer care team about counseling or support groups if you would like help dealing with your stress.

Get good sleep.

- Try to sleep 7 to 8 hours each night. Regular bed and wake-up times help with a healthy sleep routine.
- Do not exercise too late in the evening.
- Take only short naps or rest breaks (less than 30 minutes).
- Avoid caffeine after midafternoon – longer if it affects your sleep.

Eat well.

- Try to eat a diet that includes protein, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Drink fluids throughout the day.
- Ask your cancer care team about meeting with a dietitian if you are having trouble eating.



When to talk with your cancer care team

Let your cancer care team know if you have fatigue and how it is affecting your life. Ask if there is anything else you can do to help with your fatigue.

Also, ask your cancer care team if any medicines you are taking might make you feel tired and sleepy. If so, they might be able to change you to a different medicine or dose.

Call your cancer care team as soon as possible if you:

- Can't get out of bed for more than a day
- Have problems waking up
- Have problems catching your breath when you are active
- Notice your fatigue seems to be getting worse



When to go to the ER or call 911

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you:

- Feel confused or dizzy
- Lose your balance or fall
- Feel short of breath, even when resting



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/fatigue or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

