



Cancer-related Fatigue

Cancer-related fatigue is an extreme form of fatigue among people with cancer. It is a severe lack of energy that goes beyond usual tiredness – and doesn't go away with sleep or rest. It can make you feel physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. At least 8 of 10 people with cancer report experiencing this type of debilitating fatigue at some point during their cancer. Cancer-related fatigue can last for weeks, months, or even years; and for some people with cancer, it can continue after treatment ends.

Symptoms

- Feeling tired even when getting enough sleep or rest
- Feeling too weak to do usual activities
- Feeling exhausted or having no energy
- Feeling worn out, heavy, or slow
- Having trouble concentrating
- Having low energy that negatively impacts work, your social life, day-to-day tasks, or your ability to follow your cancer treatment plan

Causes

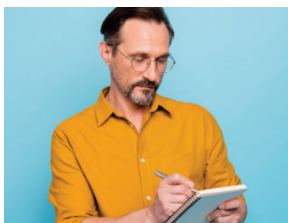
Often there are many factors that can cause fatigue including:

- Cancer
- Side effects of treatment
- Emotional stress
- Sleep problems
- Physical pain
- Changes in activity level
- Poor nutrition
- Changes in blood counts, hormone levels, and electrolytes can also impact one's energy.

How do you manage fatigue?

- **Be physically active.** Regular activity – especially walking – is a good way to ease fatigue. It can be hard to get moving when you already feel tired, but it can have real benefits. Remember to start small and gradually increase your activity level. Avoid exercising too late in the evening, which can make it harder to get to sleep. Find the balance that works for you.
- **Rest.** Plan your day so you have time to take it easy. Take short naps or rest breaks (30 minutes or less), rather than one long nap during the day. Too much rest, though, can lower your energy level and make it harder to sleep at night.
- **Try to sleep 7 to 8 hours each night.** Sleep experts tell us that having regular times to go to bed and get up helps us keep a healthy sleep routine. Try to stick to a regular sleep schedule.

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Prioritize your daily tasks.

Put the items that are most important to you toward the top, and focus on those. Spread those activities throughout the day, taking breaks in between. Do things slowly, so that you won't use too much energy at once. This is called pacing.

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- **Be alert for early signs of fatigue.** This can differ from person to person or from day to day. Some warning signs might be tired eyes, boredom or low motivation, or sleepiness.
- **Monitor your fatigue level** to get a better idea of the times of days when you may have more energy and plan activities then. Plan rest for times when you're likely to have less energy.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Focus on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains – and limit red and processed meats. Talk to your healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns about your nutritional intake.
- **Limit caffeine.** It can interfere with your sleep. If you have caffeine, try to use it before noon.
- **Try talking to a trained therapist.** Sharing your experiences and feelings with others can help ease the burden of fatigue. You can also learn coping strategies by talking about your situation. Ask your healthcare team to put you in touch with psychology services.
- **Ask your support system for help when you need it.** Extreme fatigue can make it hard or nearly impossible to do some things. So be sure to reach out for help. It's natural to sometimes struggle with feeling like a burden, but try to remember that you would do the same for them if they were in your situation.

Fatigue and Depression

Cancer-related fatigue can look a lot like depression. While it is possible to have both conditions, people can also experience fatigue *without* depression. However, if you are feeling down, have a low mood, or can't enjoy activities you usually like, it is important to talk to your treatment team about screening for depression.

If you are experiencing severe depression or thoughts of suicide, dial 988 for immediate assistance.

Additional Resources

- American Cancer Society: cancer.org
- Siteman Psychology Service: 314-747-5587

This handout is for informational purposes only. It should not be used in place of advice or instructions given by your doctor. Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have questions about your care.

Visit siteman.wustl.edu for more information.

Survivorship Program Mission

To improve the quality of life of cancer patients through education, research and wellness. The survivorship program supports patients, families and caregivers throughout the continuum of diagnosis, treatment and beyond.



Siteman Cancer Center complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex.

Atención: hay servicios de asistencia de idiomas disponibles a su disposición sin costo. Llame al 314-747-5682 (TTY: 1-800-735-2966).

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