

Understanding cancer-related fatigue



What is cancer-related fatigue?

Fatigue is being very tired emotionally, mentally, and physically. People who are fatigued have less energy to do the things they want or need to do. Since your cancer diagnosis, you may have noticed changes that affect your mood, work, hobbies, and relationships. You may not even feel like yourself. This could be due to cancer-related fatigue.

What are the causes?

The causes of cancer-related fatigue are not fully understood. Here are some possible causes:

The cancer itself

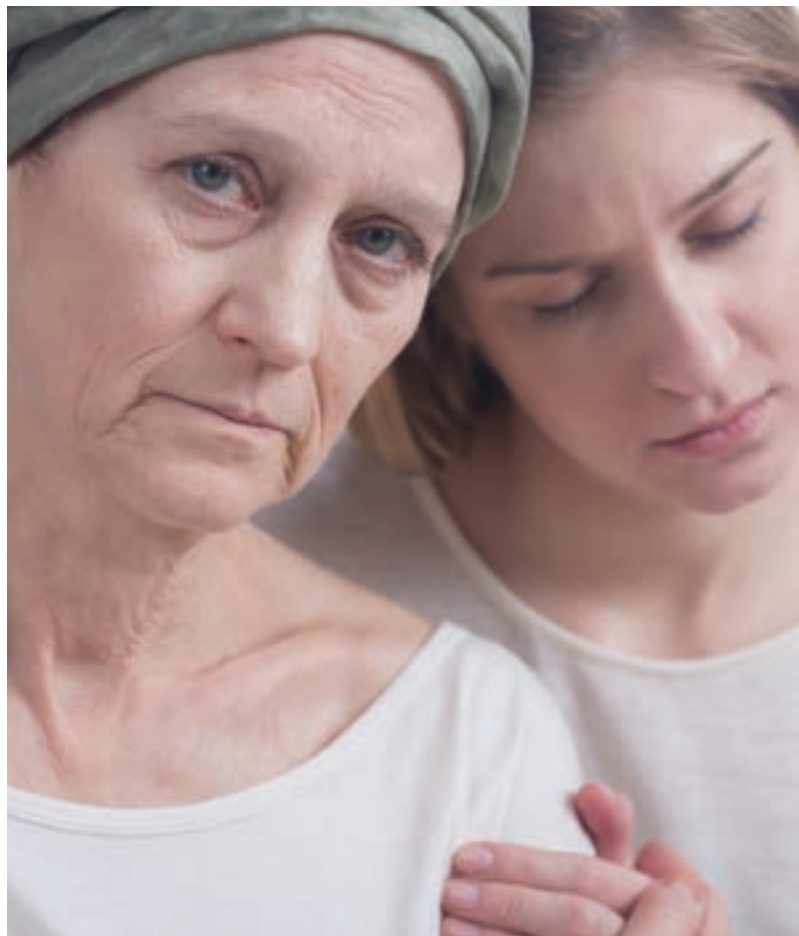
- Sometimes cancer creates harmful chemicals in the body that may cause fatigue.

Cancer treatment

- Cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and biologic therapy, can cause fatigue.
- A condition called anemia (not enough red blood cells) can cause fatigue.

Other factors

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Sleep problems
- Poor diet
- Pain
- Medicines
- Depression
- Other medical conditions



Talk with your healthcare provider about the possible causes of your cancer-related fatigue.

“Fatigue that was unexplained was probably the most painful for me, because, I’m the kind of person who likes to know what’s going on. When something is going on that I can’t explain, it’s very frustrating.”

Differences between cancer-related fatigue and everyday fatigue

Cancer-related fatigue is different from the tiredness that most people feel from time to time, even when they are healthy.

This type of fatigue can last for months, even years, in some cases. Sometimes the fatigue lasts even after cancer treatment ends.

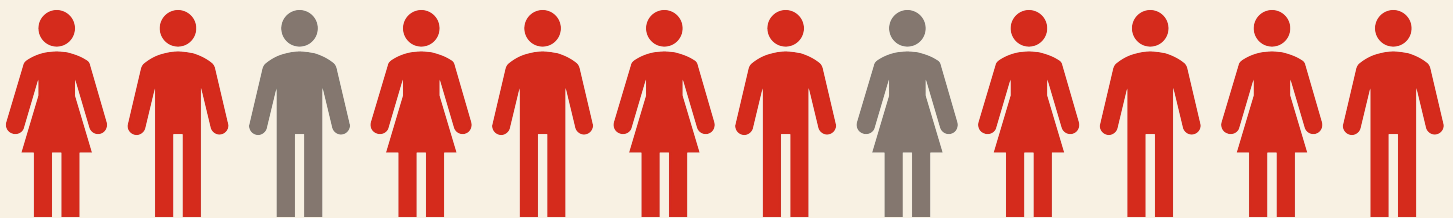


With cancer-related fatigue:

- You feel weak and lack energy. For example, you may be too tired to eat, walk to the bathroom, or even use the TV remote.
- You find it hard to think or move, and resting or sleeping doesn't help.
- Your tiredness is more intense. For example, your arms and legs may feel heavy and hard to move or you may stay in bed for more than 24 hours.

With everyday fatigue:

- You have less energy to do the things you need or want to do.
- You usually don't feel tired for long periods of time.
- You may feel better or refreshed after taking a nap.



Among people with cancer,
80% to 100% of patients
report having fatigue.

Tips that can help

Here are some ways you can make life easier with cancer-related fatigue.



Save your energy.

Save your energy for the things you really want to do. Don't push yourself.



Prioritize your activities.

Each day, decide which things are most important to you to do. Then spread out these activities throughout the day.



Improve your sleep habits.

Set up your bedroom in a way that will help you sleep. For example, keep the temperature in a cool, comfortable range. Have the room as quiet as possible. Also consider using blackout curtains or eye shades to keep out any light. Try to relax by listening to music or reading before bedtime.



Go easy on yourself.

Know that it may take you a little longer to do things than it did in the past. When fatigue holds you back from doing a task, try doing a low energy task such as:

- Listening to music.
- Reading.
- Watching a movie.



Don't try to do everything yourself.

Ask family, friends, or a neighbor to help you with things like:

- Shopping for groceries.
- Preparing meals.
- Household chores such as laundry.
- Driving you to the places you need to go.

“It was really my mother’s suggestion...she said do little things, give yourself a reward, and it works. I may still be tired, but I try to set a goal for myself. And if I make that goal, either fully or half way, I’m happy.”



Try to eat healthy foods.

Cancer and its treatment can cause changes in your diet and eating habits. These changes can mean that you do not get enough of the nutrients and calories you need. As a result, you may lose weight. All of these changes can make fatigue worse. Try to eat:

- Fruits and vegetables such as broccoli, leafy greens, and apples.
- Proteins such as fish, beans, and tofu.
- Whole grains such as whole wheat pasta, brown rice, and barley.
- Healthy fats and oils such as olive oil, avocado, and nuts.



Look into counseling and support.

Having cancer can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression, making your cancer-related fatigue worse. Managing them may help improve your fatigue. Consider:

- Talking with a counselor.
- Joining a support group.
- Having a list of people you can call for support.



Try relaxation therapy.

You may need help managing stress, and you may not be able to sleep as well as you should. Massage therapy, yoga, and meditation may help. You can also try muscle relaxation. Start by tensing, then relaxing, the muscles in your toes. Then slowly work your way up to your head and neck.



Take your medicines as prescribed.

Your healthcare team may prescribe one or more medicines to help you manage fatigue.



Try to move and be more active

It may be surprising, but being active is one way to manage fatigue. It may help you improve your strength and energy. Studies show that cancer patients who exercise are less tired and depressed and sleep better than those who don't exercise. Every cancer patient is different. Only exercise as much as you are able. Stretching, swimming, and walking are all ways to move and be active.

My fatigue tracker

Tracking your fatigue can help you plan for your high energy and low energy tasks. Sharing your tracker with your healthcare team can help you work together to find ways to manage your fatigue. Make copies of these pages to track your fatigue for a longer period of time.



Talking with your healthcare team

You may not always think to tell your healthcare providers that you have fatigue. This could be because you don't think they can do anything about it. However, sharing about how it affects your everyday life may help them find the cause of your fatigue and give you tips to manage it.

Date: <u>16/5/2020</u>	Date: _____	Date: _____
My fatigue level (from 0 = none to 10 = extreme): <u>6</u>	My fatigue level (from 0 = none to 10 = extreme): _____	My fatigue level (from 0 = none to 10 = extreme): _____
I had the most energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: Morning	I had the most energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: _____	I had the most energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: _____
I had the least energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: Night	I had the least energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: _____	I had the least energy in the morning, afternoon, or night: _____
Activities I did today: Made breakfast Changed bed linens	Activities I did today: _____ _____ _____	Activities I did today: _____ _____ _____
Medicines I took and/or treatments I had today: None today	Medicines I took and/or treatments I had today: _____ _____ _____	Medicines I took and/or treatments I had today: _____ _____ _____

“I’ve learned to pace myself differently. I let myself nap for two or three hours.”

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

My fatigue level
(from 0 = none to
10 = extreme):

My fatigue level
(from 0 = none to
10 = extreme):

My fatigue level
(from 0 = none to
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I had the most energy
in the morning,
afternoon, or night:

I had the most energy
in the morning,
afternoon, or night:

I had the least energy
in the morning,
afternoon, or night:

I had the least energy
in the morning,
afternoon, or night:

I had the least energy
in the morning,
afternoon, or night:

I had the least energy
in the morning,
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Activities I did today:

Activities I did today:

Activities I did today:

Activities I did today:

Medicines I took and/or
treatments I had today:

Medicines I took and/or
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Additional resources

Below are a few additional resources to help you learn more about cancer-related fatigue. This list is meant to be a starting point and is not a list of all of the resources that are available.

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship

www.canceradvocacy.org