Cancer Therapy: Managing Side Effects – Fatigue

What is cancer-related fatigue?
Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most common side effects of cancer and cancer treatments. This type of fatigue is very different than feeling tired from everyday life. It may include physical, mental and emotional fatigue. You may feel more tired than usual with or without activity.

How do people with cancer describe this fatigue?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Drained</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>No energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lack of energy</td>
<td>Difficult to concentrate or think clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepiness</td>
<td>Forgetful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowsiness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Just don’t feel like myself”</td>
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What causes cancer-related fatigue?
Cancer-related fatigue may be caused by any of the following:
- Cancer treatments
- Anemia (low red blood cell count)
- Sleep changes
- Stress
- Certain medicines
- Not eating well
- Pain
- Having additional health problems

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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How do I know if I have cancer-related fatigue?

A Fatigue Rating Scale can help you track symptoms and learn about your fatigue pattern. Keep track of how you are feeling each day. Give your fatigue a number. Use a scale from 1 to 10 to rate your fatigue. Ten is used for the worst level of fatigue. Zero is no fatigue.

![Fatigue Rating Scale](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatigue Rating Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can do what you want when you want.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade 0</th>
<th>Grade I</th>
<th>Grade II</th>
<th>Grade III</th>
<th>Grade IV</th>
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What are some things that can help with fatigue?

If you experience cancer-related fatigue, here are some things that may help manage this side effect:

- Stay active each day. Small activities can help get some exercise into your daily routine. Take a short walk or set a goal to do easy exercises or a bit of work around the house.
- Plan your day with rest periods before and after activities.
- Drink plenty of water. Drinking an 8-ounce glass of water, eight times a day is best, unless your doctor tells you differently.
• Eat as well as you can. Try eating small meals or snacks throughout the day. Eat foods high in protein like meat, poultry, fish, cheese, yogurt and milk shakes.

• Use nutrition supplements like Ensure, Boost or Carnation Instant Breakfast with meals or as a snack. This can help give you extra vitamins, minerals, calories and protein to help fight fatigue.

• Care for your spirit through religion, nature or however you choose. Energizing your spirit can help you cope with the symptoms of fatigue.

• Get help to manage stressful problems, difficult emotions or situations.

• Accept offers from others if you need help with chores or tasks.

When should I call the doctor or nurse?

Call the doctor or nurse if you have any of the following:

• Too tired to get out of bed for the past 24 hours

• Feel confused or cannot think clearly

• Your fatigue becomes worse

Where can I get more information and resources?

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. If you would like more information, ask for these patient education handouts:

• Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue with Good Nutrition

• Using Exercise to Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue

• Cancer Survivorship

• Cancer Internet Resources

• JamesCare for Life Programs - JamesCare for Life offers a wide range of programs to support patients, families and caregivers during and after cancer.

For more information about The James, we encourage you to visit our website at cancer.osu.edu

For a video on Cancer-Related Fatigue, you can visit http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos.