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?

- Weakness
- Exhaustion
- A lack of energy
- Sleepiness
- Drowsiness
- “Just don’t feel like myself”
- Drained
- No energy
- Difficult to concentrate or think clearly
- Forgetful

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 feel 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatigue Rating Scale</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate or Medium Fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Severe Fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worst Fatigue</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatigue Free</th>
<th>Mild Fatigue</th>
<th>Moderate Fatigue</th>
<th>Severe Fatigue</th>
<th>Extreme Fatigue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can do what you want when you want.</td>
<td>Able to do activities but have to cut back. In a stop and start mode.</td>
<td>Able to do self-care (bathe and dress). Need rest between activities. Frequent naps. Cannot stay focused on TV shows. Need to pace self.</td>
<td>Just want to stay in bed. No appetite; unable to pay attention to something as short as a TV commercial.</td>
<td>Unable to do any care for yourself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 0</td>
<td>Grade I</td>
<td>Grade II</td>
<td>Grade III</td>
<td>Grade IV</td>
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What are some things that can help with fatigue?

If you have 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.

- Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, drink 8 to 10 cups of non-caffeinated fluid each day to stay hydrated.
• Eat as well as you can. It can help to eat small meals or snacks during the day. Eat foods high in protein such as meat, poultry, fish, cheese, yogurt and milkshakes.
• Use nutrition supplements such as 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 your 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 unable to 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](http://cancer.osu.edu)

Go to this video link: [http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos](http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos) to learn more about your cancer diagnosis, treatment and care.