7 Ways to Manage Cancer-Related Fatigue

Just as every cancer patient's treatment is different, the fatigue they have will be different, too. While one person may feel very tired, another may not. And one person's fatigue may last much longer than another person's.

There is no way to know whether you will have fatigue or how bad it will be. But there are things you can do to help fight fatigue. Here are 7 tips to help manage cancer-related fatigue:

1. Rest, but not too much.

   Plan your day so you have time to rest. Take short naps or breaks (30 minutes or less), rather than one long rest period during the day. Too much rest can decrease your energy level. Try to sleep 7-8 hours each night. If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your health care team.

2. Stay active.

   Stay as active as you can. Regular moderate exercise — especially walking — has been found to be a good way to ease fatigue.

   To help you plan your activities, keep a diary of how you feel each day. When talking about your fatigue, doctors or nurses may ask things like how bad it is (often rated from 0 to 10), what are the patterns to it, and what makes it better or worse? Keeping a record of how you feel makes it easy to answer these questions.

   Many doctors have their patients see a physical therapist or exercise physiologist to figure out the best exercise program for their situation. Talk to your doctor about the type of exercise that's best for you.

3. Save your energy.

   First of all, prioritize. Decide which activities are really important to you and which ones aren't.

   Plan ahead. Spread your activities throughout the day. Take rest breaks between activities.

   Don't push yourself by standing too long or by doing activities in extreme temperatures. Even long, hot showers or baths can drain your energy.

   Store items that you use often within easy reach, so you won't have to strain or walk to get them.

4. Get help.

   Ask your family or friends to help with the things you find tiring or hard to do. This may be things like mowing the lawn, preparing meals, doing housework, or running errands. Don't force yourself to do more than you can manage.

   It may be hard for others to understand that rest does not make your fatigue go away. Try to explain that the fatigue you feel is different from "normal" fatigue — this may help them understand.

   Many people may ask if there's anything they can do for you. People who offer to help really want to, but they may not know what to do. Making specific requests can give them something to do that really helps you and makes them feel good, too.
It can help you even more to pick a “job coordinator” who can organize people to sign up for routine chores. Your coordinator can also explain if there are times when you are so tired that you don’t even have the energy to talk to your friends and loved ones.

5. Get support.

Think about joining a support group. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue. You can learn coping hints from others by talking about your situation.

Ask your health care professional to put you in touch with a support group in your area. Or contact us to find a group near you.

6. Eat well.

Drink plenty of water and juices. Eat as well as you can. Try to eat at least 2½ cups of fruits and vegetables each day. Get enough protein and calories to help your body heal.

7. Call your doctor.

Call your doctor if you feel too tired to get out of bed for a 24-hour period, if you feel confused, dizzy, lose your balance or fall, have problems waking up, have problems catching your breath, or if the fatigue seems to be getting worse.

Fatigue caused by cancer and its treatment is short-term, experts say. It will take time to feel like yourself again, but you can expect your energy to come back even faster if you are able to stay active.

To learn more

Fatigue in People With Cancer

Feeling Tired vs. Cancer-Related Fatigue

Last Medical Review: 08/16/2012
Last Revised: 08/16/2012

http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/physicalsideeffects/fatigue/sev... 10/17/2014