



Managing Cancer Related Fatigue

For People Affected by Cancer

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CANADIAN PARTNERSHIP
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Managing Cancer Related Fatigue

For People Affected by Cancer

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- What can I do to manage fatigue?
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What is Cancer Related Fatigue?

Cancer related fatigue:

- is a feeling of tiredness and exhaustion in the body and mind.
- is related to cancer or its treatment.
- is not related to recent activity or exertion.
- does not get better with rest or sleep.
- interferes with a person's ability to function in daily life.

Fatigue is the most common symptom felt by cancer patients. It can occur at any time during treatment and can continue after cancer treatment ends.

Cancer related fatigue is different from fatigue you may have felt at other times in your life. Unlike cancer related fatigue, regular fatigue is a feeling of being tired and having little energy, but it gets better with rest and sleep.

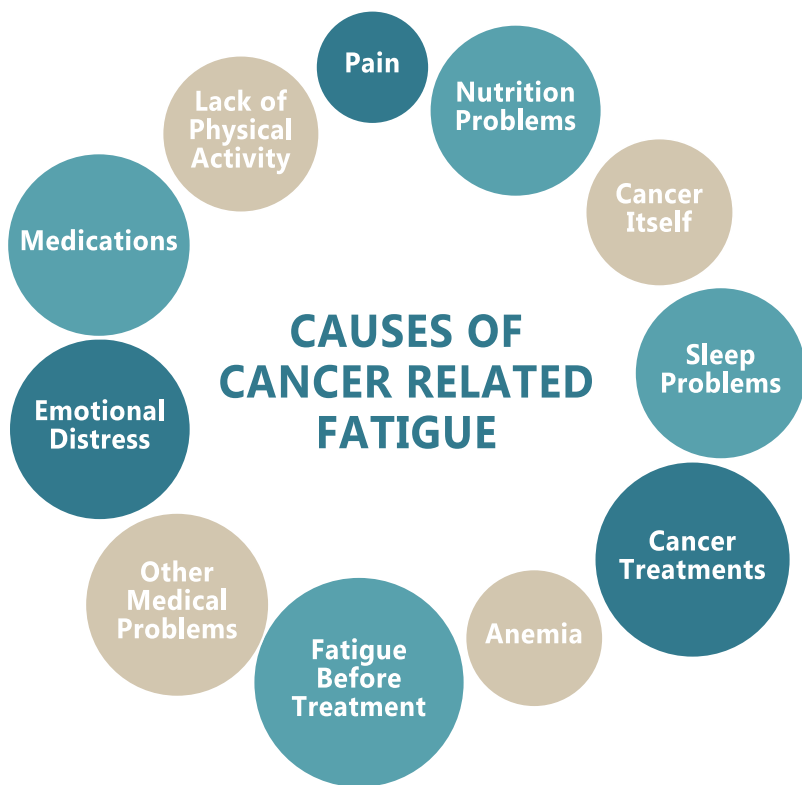
Cancer related fatigue is more severe and lasts longer than other types of fatigue that you may have felt in everyday life.



What Causes Cancer Related Fatigue?

Cancer related fatigue can be caused by cancer, cancer treatment or many other factors that happen at the same time. It may not be possible to know the exact cause of fatigue.

It is important to get treatment for medical problems that could be adding to your fatigue.





Managing Cancer Related Fatigue

Cancer related fatigue is more severe and lasts longer than other types of fatigue that you may have felt in everyday life.

Most people with cancer have fatigue, but each person's experience is different. Fatigue can come and go, be mild or severe, last a short or long time. There are many ways you can reduce fatigue to help yourself feel better.

It is important to speak with your doctor about your fatigue and how it affects you. There may be medical reasons for it that can be treated.

Knowing how to manage cancer related fatigue can improve your physical and emotional well-being and quality of life.

What Can I Do To Manage Cancer Related Fatigue?

Research shows that these practical tips can help:

- Improve sleep
- Find support
- Eat well
- Manage stress and emotions
- Conserve energy
- Be active
- Improve your thinking ability



Improve Sleep

To get better sleep:

Wake at the same time regardless of how much you've slept (*incl. weekends*).

Expose yourself to bright light (natural or artificial) within 30-60 minutes of waking to help increase energy and improve mood.

Exercise regularly, even just a short walk.

Designate 30-45 minutes of "clear your head" time in the early evening, devoted to problem solving, planning or worrying so it doesn't impact your ability to fall asleep at night.

Limit naps to less than 1 hour. Avoid long/late afternoon naps that could interfere with your sleep at night.

Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine in the afternoon or evening.

In the evening, limit activity and do not exercise.

Make a bedtime routine:

Relax for an hour or two before bed in dim light, engaging in sedentary, pleasant, and relaxing activities (e.g. reading, meditation, prayer, TV/mov-

ies, crosswords, warm bath, music, etc.)

Avoid the use of backlit devices like smartphones, iPads, laptops etc for 60-90 minutes before bed as the light can impact the production of hormones that regulate sleep.

Keep your room cool, quiet and dark. Use your bedroom for sleep or sexual activity, not as a place to watch TV, read or do work.

Go to bed when you are sleepy.

What to do for sleep problems:

If you have not fallen asleep within 20-30 minutes or wake and can't get back to sleep, go to another room.

Go through your bedtime routine to help you relax.

Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.

If you still cannot fall asleep, get up and repeat the same steps again.

Talk to your doctor about effective treatments if you have had difficulty sleeping for more than 2 weeks.

There is little research on the safety and use of sleeping pills for people with cancer. Try improving your sleep habits first, before talking to your doctor about medication for sleep.

A person is shown from the chest up, sitting in a meditative pose. Their hands are held in front of them, with the fingers of both hands interlaced in a mudra. The person is wearing a dark-colored top. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light.

Manage Stress & Emotions

To relax your body and mind, try:

- Deep breathing and relaxation exercises
- Guided imagery - imagine your self in a pleasant, calm place
- Meditation or clearing your mind
- Quiet activities you enjoy, such as reading or listening to music
- Gentle massage
- Gentle exercise, like yoga

To reduce stress:

- Distract yourself by playing games or talking with friends
- Try not to do too much
- Ask for help
- Take time off work or work fewer hours if possible
- Focus on positive things and those you can control
- Avoid or change situations that cause you stress

Talk to your health care team if you feel anxious, depressed or you are not coping well. You may ask to see a Social Worker, Counselor, Psychologist or Psychiatrist.

Find Support

Cancer related fatigue can affect your emotions, personal and intimate relationships, return to work, and other parts of your life.

To find support:

- Talk with someone you trust about how you are feeling. This could be a family member, close friend, social worker or another member of your health care team.
- Think about joining a support group. This gives you the chance to learn and share your feelings with others who know what you are going through. You may find a cancer support group online, or your health care team can help you find one in your community.
- Take care of your spiritual needs through nature, religion or activities that bring you peace of mind.
- Express your thoughts and feelings by writing in a journal or diary.



Be Active

Although it may seem natural to rest more when you are tired, there is strong evidence that exercise helps with cancer related fatigue.

To be active:

- Choose an activity you like, that suits your age, health and fitness level.
- Start slowly. Begin with light exercise such as a short walk, gentle yoga or stretching. Try walking to the end of your driveway or up and down your hallway to get started. Even short walks will help.
- Go at your own pace. Gradually build up to 30 minutes of activity.
- Stop and rest if an activity makes you feel sore, stiff or out of breath.

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week

- Moderate means the effort is not too easy or too hard. You should be able to talk comfortably while doing the activity, and not be out of breath.
- Moderate activity includes aerobic activities (such as walking or cycling) and strength training. Choose activities that you enjoy.
- If you cannot be active for 30 minutes, split it up into shorter sessions of 5 to 10 minutes.

Benefits of exercise:

- More energy, less fatigue
- A feeling of well-being
- Stronger muscles
- Better appetite
- Better sleep



If you have:

- Severe fatigue
- Heart or lung conditions
- Recent major surgery
- Lack of physical activity
- Limited range of movement

Ask your doctor about a referral to:

- Physiotherapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Massage Therapist

Talk to your health care team about how to exercise safely if you have:

- cancer in your bones.
- a low number of red or white blood cells, or platelets.
- a fever or infection.
- problems with balance.
- shortness of breath.





Improve Your Thinking Ability

Trouble with thinking, concentrating and remembering is common for people with cancer related fatigue.

To help you think more clearly:

- Take regular breaks for activities you enjoy, such as walking outdoors, gardening, enjoying nature, reading or listening to music.
- Talk about your concerns and seek support of family and friends.
- Use lists and calendars to help you keep organized.
- Exercise your mind with puzzles like crosswords or sudoku.
- Reduce stress with relaxation, exercise, yoga, meditation or music.
- Take notes or bring someone with you to appointments to help you remember important information.



Eat Well

Eating well gives your body the energy it needs for your day-to-day activities. Make sure you are eating and drinking enough each day to meet your body's energy needs.

Eating well means a balanced diet with a variety of foods from the four food groups:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Grain products
- Milk and alternatives
- Meat and alternatives

Protein helps with healing. Meat, poultry, fish, beans, milk and dairy products are good sources of protein.

Water and other fluids are important to prevent dehydration (your body not having enough water or fluids.) Unless you were told to drink more or less by your health care team, drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid every day.

If you are not eating well:

- Try eating small meals and snacks every two hours throughout the day.
- Cook when you have the most energy. Make extra to keep in the freezer.
- Choose food and drinks that are high in protein and calories (ie. cheese or peanut butter with crackers, granola bars, trail mix, yogurt, pudding or commercial liquid supplements [such as Boost or Ensure].)
- Ask to speak with a dietitian. A dietitian can help you find ways to meet your energy needs and help with symptoms that make eating a challenge.



Conserve Your Energy

Plan ahead

- Plan your day with time to rest before and after activities.
- Plan work or activities for the times of day when you have the most energy.
- Spread out tasks like housework over a week or month.
- Ask family or friends to help you with things you find tiring or hard to do. For example, housework, shopping, cooking, child care, running errands, caring for your pets or plants.
- Arrange your home so that most activities can be done on one floor. Keep supplies and equipment within easy reach.
- Work part-time or flexible hours, if possible.
- Plan activities or outings where you can sit down to rest.

Prioritize

- Decide which activities are really important to you. Save energy for things you enjoy most.
- Postpone less important activities or ask others to do them for you.
- Set realistic goals.

Pace

- Do one activity at a time, without rushing.
- Stop and rest before you get tired, even if it means stopping in the middle of a task.
- Rest between activities.

Position

- Sit to do things whenever possible.
- Use walking aids, such as handrails, grab bars, a cane or walker.
- Avoid heavy lifting.

A fatigue journal can help you see what times of the day you have the most energy.

Read about a fatigue journal on page 13.



How Can My Health Care Team Help?

Speak with your health care team about your fatigue. This is an important part of your care. Talk about your plans to manage your cancer related fatigue. If you have kept a journal, share this information with your doctor and health care team.

Your doctor and health care team can:

- Treat medical problems that cause fatigue
- Help you find resources in your community
- Give you support
- Refer you to specialists as needed

Each person's medical treatment will be different. You and your health care team will work together to make a plan for treating and managing cancer related fatigue that meets your needs.

When Do I Need To Get Medical Help Right Away?

See your doctor if you:

- Feel dizzy, lose balance or fall
- Feel like your fatigue is suddenly much worse
- Suddenly get short of breath or have a fast heart beat
- Have a fever higher than 38°C (100.4°F)
- Have any unexplained bleeding or bleeding that does not stop.



How Do I Keep Track of My Cancer Related Fatigue?

It may be helpful for you to keep track of your cancer related fatigue so you can plan your activities; to keep track of your progress and to know when to get help.

Use a Fatigue Journal

Every day for at least a week, take note of:

- Your symptoms of fatigue
- How tired you feel (using scale below)
- When you feel the most tired and when you have the most energy
- What makes it better or worse
- How it affects your daily activities
- How worried you are about your fatigue (using scale below)
- Your daily activities, treatments, medications and amount of sleep.

Measuring Your Cancer Related Fatigue

What number from 0 to 10 best describes how tired you are feeling?

Not tired 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Worst possible tiredness

How worried are you about your cancer related fatigue?

Not worried 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely worried

Use your journal to assess your fatigue during and after treatment. Your assessment is important information for your health care team.



Where Can I Get More Information?

Cancer Patient Navigator

Telephone: 1-855-848-3888

Canadian Cancer Society

Cancer Information Service: 1-888-939-3333; Online: www.cancer.ca

Free Pamphlet Resources

- Eating Well When You Have Cancer: A Guide to Good Nutrition
- Eating Well, Be Active: What You Can Do
- Life After Cancer
- Sexuality and Cancer

About this Guide

“Managing Cancer Related Fatigue For People Affected by Cancer” provides general information to people with cancer and their families. It is not intended to replace specific medical advice from a doctor or oncologist.

This guide was developed by a working group of health professionals at the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and the Canadian Chapter of the Cancer Patient Education Network.

We are grateful for the contributions of many cancer experts:

- Health professionals and researchers reviewed the most up-to-date evidence and practice guidelines.
- People living with cancer and their families gave us valuable insight into their experiences with fatigue and what information would be helpful.

To view the health professional’s guide: *“A Pan-Canadian Practice Guideline: Screening, Assessment and Care of Cancer-Related Fatigue in Adults with Cancer”* go to www.capo.ca/Fatigue_Guideline.pdf

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www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca





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