



Living with tiredness (fatigue)

Fatigue is a common side-effect of cancer and its treatments, and can affect up to 90% of people with cancer at some time. This may be due to the cancer itself, the symptoms caused by cancer, or the side effects of treatment.

This information is a guide to help you live with tiredness (fatigue). It is not intended to replace medical advice. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have symptoms of fatigue that you find hard to cope with. Listed below are things that you can do that may help.

Stay active

Stay as active as you can. Regular moderate exercise such as walking can help fatigue. Add other activities that are less active, such as reading or listening to music. Try to still do the things you enjoy, but shorten the time you spend or spread them across the week.

If you would like to get more active you may want to consider joining a 'walking group'.

To find a walk in your area type in your postcode on the 'Walk Finder' on www.walkingforhealth.org.uk or call: 0207 7339 85411.

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. Sleep and rest are important but don't overdo it. Too much rest can decrease your energy level.

Save your energy

Tips to help you do this include:

- keep a diary for a few days. You may be able to identify a pattern in the times when you are tired and times when you have more energy. You can then plan ahead, and carry out important activities when you are less tired.
- spread your activities across the day
- decide which activities are really important to you and which are not
- take rest breaks between activities to save your energy for the things you want to do

- spread your activities across the day
- don't do activities for long periods of time or in hot or cold temperatures
- store items within easy reach, so you won't have to strain to get them

Remember that:

- long, hot showers or baths can also drain your energy

Get help with activities and chores

Don't force yourself to do more than you can manage. It may be necessary to explain to family and friends that the fatigue you feel is different from "normal" tiredness to help them understand. Often friends and family would like to know if there is something they can do to help:

- ask your family or friends to help with the activities you find tiring
- you may want to ask friends and family to take turns doing some tasks regularly for you

Eat well

It is important to:

- drink plenty of water and juices
- try to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day (unless you have been told not to)
- eat a healthy diet which includes protein, to help your body heal
- if needed a dietitian can give you further advice

Try and have good sleep habits

These tips may help you to improve the quality of your sleep:

- develop a relaxing routine before bed such as having a bath/shower (not too long or too hot), listening to calming music, or reading a book
- try to avoid television and computer screens for at least 30 minutes before you go to bed
- try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time each morning
- if you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying, get up and do something outside the bedroom such as reading, and then go back to bed when you feel more tired
- make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and not too warm

Stress management

Stress, tension, and anxiety can make the feelings of fatigue worse. By finding ways to reduce stress you can help reduce feelings of fatigue.

Learning simple relaxation techniques can help.

For more information about this you may want to try a relaxation class at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC), telephone 020 3826 2555 for details or ask for LJMC leaflet: Relaxation and Breathing Techniques (PI39).

Get support

To help ease the burden of fatigue; ask at the LJMC about:

- support groups
- 'Hope' course
- complementary therapy
- counselling

For more information on these services, please call the LJMC on 020 3826 2555.

Talk to your nurse or doctor

Your nurse or doctor can help with advice and support.

It may be useful to keep a record of how you feel, this may help you to answer their questions:

- they may ask you to describe your fatigue by scoring how bad it is (rating it between 0 to 10)
- they may ask if there are any patterns to when you feel fatigued, or if there is anything that makes it better or worse

You should tell your doctor or nurse if you experience any of the following:

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