

Fatigue

Signs and Symptoms

This handout explains what fatigue is, what causes it, when to get help, and what you can do at home.

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms experienced by people with cancer. Fatigue is described as a lasting tiredness that gets in the way of normal life activities. Fatigue may continue long after cancer treatment is completed. If you are experiencing fatigue, it is important to talk to your team so they can help you cope with it.

What causes fatigue?

There are several possible causes for fatigue, including:

- Cancer treatment or other medications
- Cancer itself
- Poor sleep habits
- Stress
- Lower than normal number of circulating red blood cells (anemia)
- Decreased nutrition
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Mouth sores



When to get help

Call **911 immediately** if you are a caregiver and you:

- Cannot wake the patient

Contact the **clinic or after-hours clinic now** if you experience:

- Dizziness or confusion
- Difficulty catching your breath
- Too tired to get out of bed or walk to the bathroom
- Significant increase in fatigue
- Increased weakness
- Drowsiness
- Loss of balance



What you can do at home

- Exercise
 - The best way to lessen fatigue is exercise. If possible, exercise 3 to 5 hours per week. It doesn't need to be done all at once. You can exercise for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. This can be especially helpful when fatigue is severe. Ask your care team what type of exercise is best for you.
- Conserve energy:
 - Engage in light activity, like taking a walk, each day. Avoid overexerting yourself.
 - Take rest breaks throughout the day.
 - Plan activities, such as exercise, visits, or trips when you are feeling the most rested and energetic.
 - Organize work centers so that equipment is within easy reach.
 - Ask people to help. It helps you get tasks done and it makes those who want to help feel useful.
 - Arrange your household so that most activities can be done on one floor.
 - Plan activities that allow you to sit or lie down.
 - Wear a hip sack, carpenter's belt, or jacket or sweater with pockets to carry things.
 - Eat snacks between meals to keep up energy.
- Create regular rest and sleep routines:
 - Set up a regular daily schedule for sleep and wake times.
 - Avoid long naps during the day. Limit naps to 1-2 hours.
 - Play soft music, read, or meditate or pray.
 - Avoid watching TV or using your cell phone before bedtime.
 - Ask your care team for the Healthy Sleep Habits handout for more tips on healthy sleep routines.
- Keep a diary to monitor your fatigue levels. Take note of what you think may be causing increased fatigue.