

## Fatigue

### What is cancer-related fatigue?

Fatigue means feeling tired physically or mentally. Cancer or cancer treatments can cause fatigue. Cancer-related fatigue can be overwhelming. Your caregiver can also become fatigued.

### What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can be caused by one or more of the following factors:

- Not pacing yourself; not getting enough rest, or doing too much too soon
- Not having balance in your life
  - Lack of healthy foods or sufficient fluids
  - Lack of exercise; spending all your time sitting or lying down
  - Lack of support from family and friends
  - Lack of good, sound sleep
- Cancer itself, and cancer treatment
- Persistent pain
- Untreated symptoms or side effects that result from anemia or medications
- Other medical condition such as hypothyroidism or heart problems
- Stress from other factors such as family problems, divorce or work
- Depression that lasts for more than two weeks

### What are the warning signs of fatigue?

Some of the warning signs of fatigue are:

- A weak feeling over the entire body
- Difficulty concentrating
- Waking up tired after sleep
- Lack of energy or decreased energy
- Lack of motivation to be physically active
- Increased irritability, nervousness, anxiety or impatience
- No relief from fatigue, even with rest or sleep

### What can I do to prevent fatigue?

Here are some things you can do that may keep feelings of fatigue from getting worse:

- Prioritize your activities so that you complete the most important tasks of the day when you have the most energy. Delegate activities when you can.
- Place things that you use often within easy reach to save your energy.

- Unless you were given other instructions, drink 8 to 12 eight-ounce glasses (2 to 3 liters) of non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated fluids each day.
- Unless you were given other instructions, eat a balanced diet that includes protein (fish, lean meat/poultry, low-fat dairy, eggs/egg whites, legumes).
- Exercise; take short walks or do another physical activity.
  - Before you start any exercise program, discuss it with a health care professional.
  - If appropriate, your doctor may arrange for you to see a physical therapist.
- Use methods such as exercise, relaxation, visual imagery, meditation, talking with others, and professional counseling to reduce stress.
- Balance rest and activities. Schedule activities so that you have time for plenty of rest and sleep.
- Treat other medical problems that may be contributing to fatigue

## **Do I need to notify a doctor about fatigue?**

First, try the previous suggestions for preventing fatigue. Talk with your doctor if any of the following occur:

- Your fatigue does not get better, keeps coming back, or becomes severe. Signs of severe fatigue include spending all day in bed and inability to do daily activities.
- You are much more tired than you should be after an activity, or if feeling tired has nothing to do with any activity.
- Your fatigue cannot be relieved by rest or sleep.
- Your fatigue disrupts your social life or daily routine.

Depending on the cause of your fatigue, there may be prescription medications your doctor can prescribe to help reduce it. Your doctor may refer you to the Fatigue Clinic.

## **Additional information?**

For more information, please refer to the documents “Energy Conservation” and “Fatigue Management Tips: Good Sleep Hygiene” or the brochure “A Patient Guide for Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue.” If you do not have these, ask your health care professional for copies.

The video, “Cancer-related Fatigue,” is available for viewing through MDA-TV, an in-house cable television system that allows you to watch videos 24 hours a day, “on-demand.” This video also can be viewed in The Learning Center or at home on *myMDAnderson* (<https://my.mdanderson.org>).

A Cancer-related Fatigue Class meets every first and third Thursday of the month, from 12 noon -1:00 p.m. For more information, call the Patient Education Office at 713-792-7128.

You may also want to ask your doctor for a referral to the MD Anderson Fatigue Clinic. For more information, talk to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Fatigue Clinic at 713-563-7100.

Movement classes such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong and Pilates are available in the Integrative Medicine Center. For more information, call 713-794-4700.