

Fatigue and Cancer

Fatigue is the most common symptom experienced by people with cancer who are receiving cancer treatment. You may feel tired at certain times of day, tired all the time, or too tired to participate in activities of daily living and self-care. You may be tired from your cancer, tired from the effects of treatment or both.

Fatigue is caused by cancerous tumors, low blood counts, poor nutrition, cell death and repair due to chemotherapy and radiotherapy, mental exhaustion, worry, stress, pain, spending too much time in bed and medications used for treatment or comfort. There are no reliable medications to treat fatigue.



Methods to reduce fatigue:

Diet and Exercise

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can interfere with the sleep cycle.
- Engage in moderate exercise (e.g., a daily walk down the street) to boost energy.
- Drink water (e.g., at least 8 glasses daily) to help prevent dehydration, which can increase fatigue.

Environment

- Practice good sleep hygiene. Go to bed in a darkened room at the same time each night.
- Limit use of electronic devices before bedtime.
- Schedule naps and quiet time during the day.
- Schedule time for visitors or phone calls.

Call within 24 hours if you have:

- Confusion.
- Dizziness.
- Loss of balance.
- Inability to get out of bed for more than 24 hours.
- Worsening fatigue and other symptoms.
- Severe shortness of breath.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

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NOTE: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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