

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.

Causes

Fatigue may have many causes, including:

- The cancer itself and/or its treatment.
- Persistent pain.
- Untreated symptoms or side effects from anemia or medications.
- Other medical conditions, 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.
- Inadequate rest.
- Poor diet.
- Insufficient fluids.
- Lack of exercise.
- Lack of support from family and friends.

Symptoms

Some of the 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.

Prevention

Here are some things that may help manage feelings of fatigue:

- Prioritize your activities. Complete the most important tasks when you have the most energy.
- Delegate activities when you can.
- Place things that you use often within easy reach to save energy.
- Treat any medical problems that may contribute to fatigue.
- Drink enough fluid.
- Eat a balanced diet. Include plenty of protein such as fish, lean meat/poultry, low-fat dairy, eggs/egg whites and legumes.
- Exercise by taking short walks or other physical activity. Before you start any exercise program, discuss it with your health care team.
- Manage stress with exercise, relaxation, visual imagery, meditation, talking with others and counseling.
- Balance rest and activities.

Report to Your Doctor

After applying the above tips, talk with your doctor if:

- 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.
- Fatigue cannot be relieved by rest or sleep.
- Fatigue disrupts your social life or daily routine.