

Help with Feeling Fatigued or Exhausted

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/fatigue>

Cancer or cancer treatment may cause fatigue. This fatigue feels like persistent physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. It is different than feeling tired after not getting enough rest.

- It interferes with daily life.
- It does not match the person's level of activity.
- It does not improve with rest.

Most people receiving cancer treatment experience fatigue. Some will have fatigue that lasts months or years after finishing treatment. People with cancer, especially those who are older, may have other health conditions including heart disease, arthritis, reduced lung or kidney function, etc., that may impact energy level.

If you experience fatigue, talk with your health care team. Share any new symptoms or changes in symptoms.

Treating the causes of fatigue

Medical Conditions that contribute to your fatigue may include the following:

- **Pain.** Living with constant pain is often exhausting and many medicines prescribed for pain cause drowsiness and fatigue. Ask your doctor about options for managing pain if current treatment is too fatiguing.
- **Depression, anxiety, and stress** can increase exhaustion and complicate treatment. Managing and treating these often reduces fatigue.
- **Insomnia**, having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Some medicines disturb normal sleep patterns. Ask your health care team for help managing insomnia if medicine related.
- **Poor nutrition.** A well-balanced diet may help reduce fatigue. Consider talking with a nutrition counselor or registered dietitian (RD), especially when you have taste issues or nausea and vomiting.
- **Anemia**, can be common in cancer patients, is a decrease in the amount of red blood cells you have. Patients with anemia may feel extreme and overwhelming fatigue. Anemia treatment may include nutritional supplements, drugs, or blood transfusions.

Treatment side effects. Certain treatment types contribute to fatigue. For example, people commonly experience fatigue at these times:

- A few days after chemotherapy.
- A few weeks after beginning radiation therapy.
- After immunotherapy.

Other strategies to cope with fatigue

Lifestyle changes may help you cope with fatigue. These include:

- Being more physically active can help relieve cancer-related fatigue. Ask your doctor which types of physical activity are best for you. These recommendations may change during and after cancer treatment.
- Some people may benefit from working with a physical therapist, particularly if they have a higher risk of injury. Physical therapists can help patients increase or maintain physical functions.
- Counseling may help reduce fatigue. For example, cognitive behavioral therapy may help you reframe your thoughts about fatigue, improve coping skills, overcome sleep problems that contribute to fatigue.

Mind-body strategies. Evidence suggests that these can reduce fatigue in cancer survivors:

- Mindfulness practices
- Yoga
- Acupuncture

Adapted from: <https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/fatigue>

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, What is Fatigue](#)
- [NCCN, Fatigue, Patients and Caregivers](#)
- [NCCN, Fighting Cancer Fatigue](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Fatigue](#)
- [NIH, Fatigue \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [Chemocare, Fatigue and Cancer Fatigue](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Managing Fatigue](#)

Información Española

- [American Cancer Society, Cómo controlar la fatiga](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Fatiga](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Fatiga \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Cansancio por tratamiento de cáncer](#)
- [Chemocare, Fatiga y fatiga relacionada con el cáncer](#)

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