

# MANAGING FATIGUE

**Fatigue (feeling really tired) is one of the most common side effects of cancer treatment and ranks at the top of symptoms reported (alongside pain). Simple activities required of daily living can take longer, use up more energy, and feel debilitating. It's important to talk with your health care team if you experience fatigue.**

## CAUSES OF FATIGUE

- Cancer treatment. One of the most common causes of fatigue is chemotherapy—it can lower the number of red cells in your blood, which carry oxygen throughout your body and give you energy. Having fewer red blood cells means that you can get “out of breath” when you do something even mildly strenuous.
- Cancer itself
- Coping with cancer emotionally
- Cancer pain
- Anemia (low levels of red blood cells, the iron-containing cells that carry vital oxygen from the lungs to the muscles and other tissues in the body)

**Keep a side effect journal.** If you experience any treatment side effects, starting a health care journal can help. A health care journal or notebook helps you to keep all of your health information in one place.



If you are experiencing fatigue, it may be helpful to write down the following in your journal or notebook:

- When you experience fatigue
- How long the fatigue lasted
- Your diet
- Any activities you engaged in when you first felt fatigue

Have this journal with you any time you talk to your health care team.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

As with any side effect experienced during treatment, it's important to talk to your health care team if you feel fatigue. Write down your questions and concerns about any side effects and treatment in your health care journal before your next medical appointment. In addition to bringing questions, if possible, bring someone with you to any appointment. Another set of ears can help reduce confusion. Here are questions that may want to ask your health care team:

- What is the cause of my fatigue?
- How long can I expect my fatigue to last?
- What action should I take when I feel fatigue?
- What exercises or foods do you recommend to improve my energy level?
- Are there activities or foods I should avoid?

In addition to preparing questions, if possible, bring someone with you to your appointments. Another set of ears can help reduce confusion.

## TREATING FATIGUE

To determine whether there is an unrelated physical cause (like anemia) to your fatigue, your doctor may order a blood test to find out if your red blood cell count is abnormally low. If you are anemic, there are treatment options available.

Take only treatments prescribed by your doctor. Do not treat yourself with over-the-counter medicines for “iron-poor blood.” These medicines have not proven to be helpful.

There are some simple things you can do to help yourself when experiencing fatigue:

- Take 30-minute naps or breaks in a comfortable chair or bed.
- Try simple exercises such as walking or yoga, which can help regain energy and clear the mind.
- Try easier or shorter versions of the activities you enjoy.
- Ask your family or friends to help when you feel too tired to do something yourself.
- Pace yourself but try to stay active; conserve your energy for your priorities and find your own comfort level.

## AN ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKER CAN HELP

Professional oncology social workers at CancerCare understand the complex issues that arise with a cancer diagnosis. Social workers can help you manage emotional or practical concerns that may be causing symptoms and help you develop ways to cope. CancerCare’s professional oncology social workers help anyone affected by cancer, free of charge. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).



### CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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