

Facts on Fatigue

- Symptoms of cancer fatigue include:
 - extreme weariness
 - weakness
 - exhaustion
 - tiredness
 - Other warning signs include:
 - Leg pain
 - Difficulty climbing stairs or walking short distances
 - Shortness of breath after light activity
 - Difficulty performing simple tasks (cooking, cleaning, taking a shower or making a bed)
 - Today, medication for chemotherapy-related anemia can increase red blood cells and decrease the associated fatigue and its symptoms.
 - Diet and nutrition, exercise, vitamin and mineral supplements, and prescription medications may be effective at countering the effects of fatigue
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- 89 % of patients say that fatigue affects their daily routine to the following extent:
 - 75% had to change work habits
 - 69% found it harder to walk distances
 - 30% have difficulty being intimate with their partners
 - 52% feel that they cannot meet their family's needs
 - 25% feel distant from family and friends

The survey of 379 chemotherapy patients found the following:

- Fatigue was found to be the longest-lasting side effect of chemotherapy, with over a third of patients experiencing fatigue for as long as two weeks after treatment.
- The majority of cancer patients who have undergone chemotherapy (76%) reported that fatigue affects their lives more than any other treatment-related side effect.
- 60% said that fatigue was the most serious side effect of cancer, influencing their daily lives more than pain, nausea or depression. Still, it is in these areas that many doctors concentrate on in their treatment efforts.

Although studies have shown that fatigue affects almost all people with cancer, patients are largely misinformed about the condition and its possible treatments. Most patients believed that the condition would go away, with almost half (45%) believing that there was nothing their physician could do about cancer-related fatigue anyway. Three-quarters of patients believed that fatigue was something that they just had to live with. One-third of fatigued patients surveyed (32%) had been diagnosed with anemia, a common cause of fatigue, yet only 9% were being treated to correct the condition.

Fatigue causes very real problems for patients when it interferes with their work and their ability to take care of themselves. Most fatigued patients (71%) miss one or more workdays a month because of fatigue. Almost a third (31%) missed nearly an entire work week, and 28% had to stop working altogether. Almost all patients had to adjust their work habits by cutting hours or taking on less responsibility.

The impact of fatigue on family and the social lives of cancer patients experiencing fatigue is equally dramatic: most patients surveyed (59%) have difficulty socializing with their family or friends. Others felt they could not meet the needs of their loved ones, felt distant from their family members or had difficulty being intimate with their partners.

The results of the survey clearly demonstrate the need for healthcare providers to assess patients for fatigue, and to educate them on ways to manage it. In response to the survey, The Fatigue Coalition is developing a series of educational and research initiatives designed to help patients, physicians, and other practitioners better understand the onset, duration, and progression of fatigue and how to intervene successfully with the cancer patient.

Tips You Can Bank On



Planning and Organizing

- Alternate tasks that require lots of energy with those that take less.
- Plan activities daily as well as weekly to better alternate tasks.
- Delegate as much as possible. It helps you get tasks done and also allows those who want to help feel useful.
- Eliminate steps or tasks that are not essential by combining chores or errands.
- Arrange household so that most activities can be done on one level.
- Organize ahead of time so you don't have to rush.

Pacing

- Balance activities so you are doing, resting, doing, resting.
- Stop to rest before you get tired even if it means stopping in the middle of a task.
- Try to avoid spurts of activity; this can drain energy.
- Pace activities on good days as well as bad days.
- Develop a routine, to prevent overdoing.

Positioning

- Sit to do things whenever possible.
- Use assistance devices to help you maintain good posture while walking or moving about: (walker, scooter, cane, hand rails, crutches, grab bars).
 - Assistance devices or adaptive equipment can save energy by allowing you to do things without having to bend or reach.
- Avoid heavy lifting (such as children, pots and pans, laundry).
- Wear a fanny pack, carpenter's belt, or jacket or sweater with pockets to carry things.
- Use carts or wagons to move things from room to room or place to place.

Prioritizing

- Focus on things you enjoy doing.
- Be realistic with yourself.

When You're Too Tired to Eat

When just the thought of cooking or eating a meal makes you tired, try these hints to save energy:

- Let others help prepare or bring food. Family and friends usually like to help!
- Use canned, frozen, or other prepared foods, or try ordering out.
- On days when you feel well, cook extra food and freeze in small containers. Heat frozen food on days when you're tired.
- Ask the doctor, nurse, or social worker about community resources that deliver prepared meals.
- Eat frequent small meals rather than a few large meals each day.
- Have snack foods readily available.
- If you're exhausted, put some favorite foods and beverages in a cooler with ice next to you as you rest.
- Make quick meals with a microwave or blender.

Did You Know?

Fatigue is the most common side effect of cancer therapy.

Doctors and nurses are just beginning to study and learn more about this kind of fatigue.

Cancer-related fatigue is different from other kinds of fatigue.

Cancer-related fatigue is not the same as weakness or depression.

Cancer-related fatigue may continue even after treatments are through.

Cancer-related fatigue sometimes improves when you plan and pace activities and conserve energy.