



11100 Euclid Avenue • Cleveland, Ohio 44106-5000



*Produced by the Department of Nursing Resources*

## Fatigue (Tiredness): What it is and Ways to Manage

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### What it is and why it happens

Fatigue (tiredness) from chemo (chemotherapy) can range from a mild to extreme feeling of being tired. Many people describe fatigue as feeling weak, worn out, heavy or slow. Resting does not always help. Fatigue can happen all at once or little by little. People feel fatigue in different ways. You may feel more or less fatigue than someone else who gets the same type of chemo. If you receive radiation therapy along with chemo your fatigue may be more severe.

Many people say they feel fatigue during chemo and even for weeks or months after treatment is over. Fatigue can be caused by the type of chemo, the effort of making frequent visits to the doctor, or feelings such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Fatigue can also be caused by:

- Low red blood cell count
- Pain
- Medications
- Appetite loss
- Trouble sleeping
- Lack of activity
- Trouble breathing
- Infection
- Doing too much at one time
- Other medical problems

### What you can do to manage fatigue

- **Be active.** Exercise is the best way to lessen fatigue. Ask your cancer doctor if it's safe for you to exercise during your treatment. Even 15 or 30 minutes of exercise a day, like walking or doing yoga, can help give you energy. To learn more, ask for our handout, **Exercise During and After Cancer Treatment**, or call 216-844-5432 to have a copy sent to you.

## More ways you can manage fatigue

- **Do things to help you relax.** You might want to try meditation, prayer, yoga, guided imagery or visualization.
- **Eat and drink well.** Try to eat 5 to 6 small meals and snacks rather than 3 large meals. Keep foods around that are easy to fix, such as canned soups, frozen meals, yogurt and cottage cheese. Drink 6 to 8 (eight ounce) cups of liquids each day. You can also try protein shakes like Boost Plus<sup>®</sup> or Ensure Plus<sup>®</sup>.
- **Plan time to rest.** You may feel better when you rest or take a short nap during the day. If you feel tired, stop and rest. Many people say that it helps to rest for just 10 to 15 minutes rather than nap for a long time. If you nap, try to sleep for less than 1 hour. Keeping naps short will help you sleep better at night.
- **Try not to do too much.** With fatigue, you may not have enough energy to do all the things you want to do. Choose the activities you want to do and let someone else help with the others. Try quiet activities, such as reading, knitting or learning a new language on tape.
- **Sleep at least 8 hours each night.** You are likely to sleep better at night when you are active during the day. You may also find it helpful to relax before going to bed. For instance, you might read a book, work on a jigsaw puzzle, listen to music, or do other quiet hobbies. Stay away from alcohol and caffeine after 6 p.m. These may keep you awake.
- **Plan a work schedule that works for you.** Fatigue may affect the amount of energy you have for your job. You may feel well enough to work your full schedule. Or you may need to work less – maybe just a few hours a day or a few days each week. If your job allows, you may want to talk with your boss about ways to work from home. Or you may want to go on medical leave (stop working for a while) while getting chemo.
- **Let others help.** Ask family members and friends to help when you feel fatigue. Perhaps they can help with household chores or drive you to and from doctor's visits. They might also help by shopping for food and cooking meals for you to eat now or freeze for later.
- **Learn from others who have cancer.** People who have cancer can help by sharing ways that they manage fatigue. One way to meet others is by joining a support group – either in person or online. Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn more.

- **Keep a diary of how you feel each day.** This will help you plan how to best use your time. Share your diary with your nurse. Let your doctor or nurse know if you notice changes in your energy level, whether you have lots of energy or are very tired.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse.** Your doctor may prescribe medication that can help decrease fatigue, give you a sense of well-being, and increase your appetite. He or she may also suggest treatment if your fatigue is from a low red blood cell count (also called anemia).

**Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have:**



- Fatigue that is so bad that you cannot do your normal activities
- Dizziness or loss of balance when walking or getting out of a bed or chair
- Trouble breathing
- Trouble walking
- Fallen and hurt yourself

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This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.