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Inform[®]

Fatigue is a Medical Condition

For most people, feeling tired is a temporary condition. It's something you feel after you wash the kitchen floor or mow the lawn, for example, and it usually goes away if you take a quick nap. Cancer treatments, however, often cause "fatigue." Fatigue is a tiredness not from exertion or exercise, but from the changes in your body caused by cancer and cancer treatments. For people with cancer, fatigue is a common medical condition. It can be chronic (meaning it doesn't go away), and it can severely affect your health and quality of life. Unfortunately, many patients don't talk to their doctor about fatigue because they don't understand exactly what it is, or because they think that feeling tired from cancer or cancer treatment is "normal." It's important to talk to your doctor, and ask him or her about medications that can help relieve fatigue.

What Is Fatigue?

No one would be surprised to think of weakness or exhaustion as signs of fatigue, but there are other, less obvious signals, too. "I just don't feel like myself," is a common statement made by people with cancer, especially if they are undergoing chemotherapy. Pain in your legs and difficulty climbing stairs or walking short distances may also be signs of fatigue. Fatigue can also affect the way you think and feel. For example, you may lose interest in your pastimes, feel impatient, and have difficulty concentrating.

What Causes Fatigue?

One of the most common causes of fatigue is chemotherapy. Chemotherapy 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. Chemotherapy or general cancer pain can also disrupt your eating or sleeping habits, both of which can result in fatigue.

What Can You Do?

Everyone's experience with fatigue and treatments is different. Some people can return to work or normal activities, while others cannot. Here are some tips for managing fatigue:

- Take several short naps or breaks in a comfortable chair rather than in bed.
- Plan your day so that you have time to rest.
- Take short walks or do some light exercise if possible.
- Try easier or shorter versions of the activities you enjoy.
- Eat as well as you can, and drink plenty of fluids.
- Ask your family or friends to help you with tasks you find difficult or taxing.

- Join a support group, or seek help from an oncology social worker. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue, and you can often learn coping hints from talking about your situation.
- Cultivate interests that can be less strenuous, like listening to music or reading.
- Keep a diary of how you feel each day. This will help you in planning your daily activities. It can also help you communicate with your medical team about how well anti-fatigue medications you may be taking are working.
- **Finally, remember that you don't have to do everything. Save your energy for the activities you find most important.**



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers can help you cope with the side effects of cancer treatments. Our social workers offer people with cancer and their loved ones individual counseling and support groups over the telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, practical help and referrals to other resources that help you cope with a cancer diagnosis.

The CANCERcare® Constellation of Services



CancerCare's services are provided free of charge to anyone affected by cancer

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