Managing Cancer Related Fatigue

Support & Family

Cancer related fatigue can have a big effect on your emotions, personal relationships, work, and other parts of your life. The people in your life are more important than ever - you need them to help you manage expectations and get a shared vision of what will need to change to help you get through a tough time.

Set Priorities

- Discuss fatigue with important people in your life.
- Don’t be scared to ask for help and maybe more importantly, take it when it is offered.
- The feeling of not being alone in dealing with these challenges can help your frame of mind.

Remember the 3 Keys

- Redesign your week around your priorities.
- Focus on nutritious food, good sleep, good friends, and finding a place that you can visit that brings you peace.
- Make sure everyone understands the role these things play in your recovery - have them help make sure you get what you need.

Ask For Help

- Expect that it might take 2 to 3 months for fatigue levels to return to normal.
- For some the road back to normal can take even longer.
- This reality impacts you and the people around you - they can help lighten your load, but remember they need to take care of themselves too.

Manage Expectations
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**STRESS & THINKING**

The best treatment for fatigue is often you. It is important to get treatment for medical problems that could be adding to your cancer related fatigue - but you can also gain a lot of strength through improving your thoughts, attitudes and behaviours around fatigue.

To reduce stress and help you think more clearly, it’s important to remember the 3 keys.

Thoughts

- Attitude is key - you are the cure for fatigue!
- Focus on positive things and things that you can control.
- Dealing with cancer can clarify what priorities you should focus on. Consider where various commitments fit on your new priority list.
- When stressed or worried, try distracting yourself with puzzles like crosswords or sudoku.

Attitudes

- You will need to walk a fine line - being optimistic but also realistic, hoping for the best but preparing for less.
- Self-care skills like being adaptive, flexible and giving yourself time to process are much improved with a positive attitude.

Behaviours

- Dealing with cancer can effect your sense of control - which can effect whether you react with fear, joy, worry, sadness, or anger in certain situations.
- Cognitive Behavioural techniques - such as pleasant activity scheduling, thought records and experiments designed to test your thinking - can help you to regain a sense of control and manage your behaviour.

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EATING

You may find you need to be more thoughtful about nutrition when starting cancer treatment. Eating well can help give your body the energy it needs for your day-to-day activities. For this to work, it is important that you make sure you are eating and drinking enough each day to meet your body’s energy needs.

Remember the 3 Keys

Eat Well

- Eating well means a balanced diet with a variety of foods from the four food groups:
  - Vegetables and fruit
  - Grain products
  - Milk and alternatives
  - Meat and alternatives

- Water and other fluids are important to prevent dehydration (your body not having enough water or fluids).
- Unless you were told to drink more or less by your health care team, drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid every day.

Drink Lots of Fluids

- Eat small meals and snacks though the day.
- Cook when you have the most energy. Make extra to keep in the freezer.
- Drink a nutrition supplement (such as Ensure® or Boost®) with meals or as a snack. These drinks give you extra vitamins, minerals, calories and protein.
- Ask to speak with a dietitian. A dietitian can help you find ways to meet your energy needs and help with symptoms that make eating a challenge.
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A good night’s sleep is an important part of managing cancer related fatigue. Though taking a sleeping pill may seem like a quick fix, there is little research on the safety of using sleeping pills for people with cancer. Try improving your sleep habits first, before talking to your doctor about medication for sleep.

Remember the 3 Keys

• Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
• Exercise regularly, even if it is just a short walk.
• Limit naps to less than 1 hour. Avoid long or late afternoon naps that could interfere with your sleep at night.
• In the afternoon and evening, avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine.
• In the evening, limit activities and do not exercise.

• Relax for an hour or two before bedtime. Turn off the TV, listen to quiet music, read or take a warm bath.
• Keep your room cool, quiet and dark.
• Use your bedroom for sleep or sexual activity, not as a place to watch TV, read or do work.
• Go to bed when you are sleepy.

Get Better Sleep

• If you have not fallen asleep within 15 minutes, or you wake and can’t get back to sleep, get up and go to another room.
• Go through your bedtime routine to help you relax.
• Go back to bed when you feel sleepy.
• If you still cannot fall asleep, get up again and repeat steps 2 and 3.

Make a Bedtime Routine

Tackle Sleep Problems
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Research shows the #1 treatment for fatigue is **EXERCISE**

A low to moderate intensity exercise program can substantially reduce cancer-related fatigue and improve your quality of life.

This may feel counter-intuitive when you’re feeling ill, have been up all night, or have just come out of surgery. You will need to take the idea and apply it in a way that works for you.

**Remember the 3 Keys**

- **Aim For**
  - ½ HR PER DAY

- **Pick Any Exercise You Like**
  - No specific form of exercise has been found to give a greater benefit than any other.
  - Choose activities that you enjoy - walking, low weights, yoga, cycling, waving your arms in bed - whatever works for you.

- **Track Your Progress**
  - Many patients find it helpful to track their activity with tools like a pedometer or journal.
  - These can help you set goals and see your own progress.
  - It can be very encouraging to see the improvements you make over time.

• Start slowly - gradually build up to 30 minutes of activity.
• Figure out for yourself what is the amount of exercise that energizes you and what tires you.
• If you cannot be active for 30 minutes, split it up into shorter sessions of 5 to 10 minutes.