



# Cancer, treatment, and fatigue

Cancer and cancer treatment may make you feel fatigue. Fatigue is feeling so tired that you can't do even basic tasks. Even if you are getting enough sleep or rest, you may still feel very tired, weak, run down, or have no energy.

## How can fatigue affect my daily life?

Fatigue is one of the hardest side effects for many people to deal with. It can affect many parts of your life, such as:

- Your mood and feelings: You may feel moody or irritable, and this can affect your relationships with friends and family
- Your daily activities: You may have sore muscles and sleepiness that make it hard to do your everyday tasks or hobbies
- Your ability to cope with treatment
- Your ability to do your job: You may have trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Your feelings of hope for the future: You may feel less motivated or even depressed

## What can cause fatigue?

### The cancer itself

Some cancers can:

- Make your body need more energy to do tasks
- Weaken your muscles
- Damage certain organs (such as liver, kidney, heart, or lungs)
- Change your body's hormones



Some people may have this type of fatigue for months or years after finishing treatment.

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## Cancer treatments

People often feel fatigue at these times:

- A few days after a chemotherapy treatment
- A few weeks after starting radiation therapy
- A few months after immunotherapy treatment



## Pain

Living with constant pain is exhausting and stressful. And, many pain medicines cause drowsiness and fatigue.

## Depression, anxiety, and stress

Feeling depressed or down can feel stressful and lower your energy. Lowering your stress levels and treating mental health issues like depression and anxiety can help you feel less fatigue.



## Sleep problems

Not sleeping well can cause fatigue throughout your day. Some people don't sleep well because of stress, pain, and certain medicines, which can also change your normal sleep patterns.

## Poor nutrition

Cancer and cancer treatment can make it hard to eat, and eat well. When your body doesn't have enough calories or nutrients, you can feel fatigued. Eating healthy foods may improve fatigue. Consider talking with a registered dietitian to help you find foods that you can eat.

## Anemia (low red blood cells)

Many people with cancer have anemia. People with anemia may feel extreme and overwhelming fatigue. Your doctor might treat anemia with supplements, medicines, or blood transfusions.



## Other health conditions

People with cancer, especially those who are age 65 and older, may have other health conditions that make fatigue worse, such as:

- Heart problems
- Reduced lung and kidney function
- Hormone problems
- Arthritis
- Nerve problems

Treating these conditions may help with fatigue. Your doctor may ask questions or do tests to look for conditions that might be causing fatigue.

## How is fatigue diagnosed?

To learn more about your symptoms, your doctor may:

- Give you a physical exam
- Ask you questions
- Do tests, such as blood tests, urine (pee) tests, or X-rays

To help guide the conversation with your doctor, think about how you might answer these questions:

- How bad is your fatigue?
- When did the fatigue start?
- When do you feel most tired?
- How long does it last?
- Has it changed over time?
- Is there anything that makes it better or worse?



## Ways to improve fatigue symptoms

If you are having fatigue during or after your cancer treatment, ask your doctor if these strategies are right for you:

### Use your energy wisely

Use your energy on tasks that are important to you, and think about which tasks someone else could do. Also try scheduling rest into your day.

Research shows that exercise is one of the best ways to treat fatigue

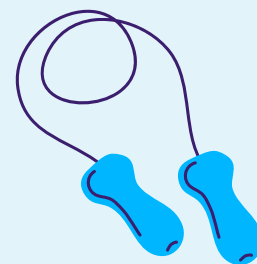
### Be active

Even though you may not feel like moving your body, being active can actually help relieve fatigue. Here are some tips:

- **Ask your doctor** which activities and how much are best for you. This may change during and after cancer treatment.
- **Consider physical therapy**, especially if you have a higher chance of being injured due to cancer, cancer treatment, or other health conditions.

Physical therapists can help you:

- Build your strength
- Lower your pain
- Improve your movement
- **Consider a personal trainer**, who can build an exercise program just for you



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## Counseling

Talking with a counselor may help with your fatigue. For example, a specific type called “cognitive behavioral therapy” may help you:

- Reframe your thoughts about fatigue
- Improve your coping skills
- Overcome sleep problems causing fatigue

## Mind-body strategies

Strategies such as mindfulness, yoga, and acupuncture can lower fatigue. Other mind-body strategies might be helpful, but have not been fully studied by researchers, including:

- Touch therapy, such as reiki
- Music therapy
- Massage
- Relaxation
- Qigong, a type of relaxation and meditation

Ask your doctor for referrals to professionals who specialize in these strategies for cancer survivors.



## Nutrition

Sometimes cancer and cancer treatment make it hard to eat healthy. Consider talking with a registered dietitian to help you:

- Get all the nutrients you need
- Find ways to eat well, especially if you have taste issues, lose your appetite, or have nausea and vomiting (throwing up)

It is important to talk with your doctor before taking any dietary or herbal supplements to make sure they do not interact with your cancer treatment

## Medicines and supplements

Talk with your doctor about medicines or supplements that could help you, such as:

- **Medicines that help you feel more alert and awake:** These are most helpful for people who are currently getting cancer treatment and people who have advanced cancer
- **Hormonal medicines:** If your thyroid gland or adrenal glands are making fewer hormones due to treatment, you may need medicine to replace these hormones
- **Supplements:** Your doctor may check your levels of iron, vitamin B12, or vitamin D, and offer a supplement if these levels are low. Other supplements like ginseng may improve cancer-related fatigue. Only take supplements with the guidance of your doctor.



## Questions to ask your doctor

- Do you think my cancer treatment will cause fatigue? If so, when?
- Why am I having fatigue?
- Will I need tests to find out more about my fatigue?
- How can I cope with fatigue?
- Should I talk with someone else to help me cope with fatigue? Such as a registered dietitian, counselor, physical therapist, or someone else?

**Talk with your doctor** if you are having fatigue. Tell them about any new or changing symptoms or side effects. Managing symptoms, including fatigue, is an important part of your cancer care and treatment.

**Write your questions here:**

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