

# Managing Fatigue

There are treatments available and steps you can take to help manage your cancer-related fatigue.

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## Describing your fatigue to your health care team

Your health care team can suggest ways to manage your fatigue. But first, they need to understand how it makes you feel. To do this, they might ask you to rate and describe your fatigue. There aren't any lab tests or x-rays to diagnose fatigue, so the best measure is how you describe it.

You might be asked to rate your fatigue as none, mild, moderate, or severe. Or you might be asked you to rate your fatigue on a scale.

Fatigue is often rated on a scale of 0-10. Using this scale, 0 means no fatigue at all, and 10 means the worst fatigue you can imagine.

No fatigue										Worst fatigue
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Mild			Moderate			Severe			

If you have any fatigue, your health care team will probably ask you for more details.

You might be asked:

- When did your fatigue first start?
- How long has it lasted?
- Has it gotten better or worse over time?
- Does anything make it better? Worse?
- Are there times of day you notice it more?
- How has it affected the activities you enjoy or the things you do every day?

## Treatment for fatigue

How your health care team treats your fatigue will depend on the cause and symptoms.

Common treatments for fatigue include:

### Medicines, supplements, and transfusions

Your cancer care team may prescribe medicines that might make you feel more alert and awake. Check with your cancer care team before taking any medicines or supplements that they didn't tell you to take. Some medicines and supplements might interact with your cancer treatment.

If you have [anemia](#)<sup>1</sup> (low red blood cells), your treatment will depend on how low your red blood cell count. You might be given supplements, medicines to help your body make more red blood cells, or transfusions.

### Pain control

If pain is adding to your fatigue, your health care team will work with you to come up with a [pain control](#)<sup>2</sup> plan. This might include medicines and non-medical ways of managing your pain.

### Counseling and stress management

Your [emotions, moods, and mental health](#)<sup>3</sup> could make your fatigue worse. Counseling, stress management, and relaxation exercises might help you cope and learn to deal with the tiredness you feel.

### Sleep therapy

If you're having [problems sleeping](#)<sup>4</sup>, or if you're sleeping too much, your cancer care team might suggest sleep therapy. This therapy can help you sleep better, wake up less, and learn ways you can change your routine to get a more restful night's sleep.

### **Physical activity**

Lack of physical activity can make fatigue worse. If you would like help finding a safe [physical activity plan](#)<sup>5</sup>, ask your health care team to refer you to a physical therapist or other exercise specialist.

### **Nutrition**

Some people with cancer have a hard time eating a diet with enough nutrients. Your cancer care team may want to check and see if you have enough vitamins and minerals in your body.

It also might help for you to talk with a registered dietician (RD) if you are having trouble eating. An RD is an expert in nutrition, food and diet and can give you ideas about how to eat more food and drink fluids.

### **Palliative care**

Many people with cancer-related fatigue have other side effects as well. If so, your cancer care team might suggest that you work with a palliative care team.

[Palliative care](#)<sup>6</sup> helps patients and caregivers manage the symptoms of cancer and side effects of cancer treatment at any point after diagnosis.

## **Tips for managing fatigue**

There are many things you can do to help manage your fatigue, including:

### **Physical activity and exercise**

**Be as active as you can.** Start slowly and add more activity as you are able.

**Try to get some physical activity each day.** Even short walks can ease fatigue and help you feel better.

**Combine aerobic activity and weight training.** Try to get a combination of aerobic

activity (walking, riding a bicycle, swimming, etc.) and resistance training (weights).

**Try other types of activity.** Activities like yoga, tai chi, or stretching can also help ease fatigue.

**Follow a daily routine.** Keep as normal a level of activity as you can.

Check with your doctor or cancer care team before you become more physically active if you have:

- Cancer that has spread to your bones (bone metastasis)
- Low platelet count
- Fever or active infection
- Anemia (low red blood cell counts)
- Balance problems, weakness, or other problems that make it more likely that you will fall

## Energy conservation

**Rest, but not too much.** Too much rest can lower your energy level and make it harder to sleep at night.

**Focus on important things first.** Decide which things you most need or want to do and focus on those first. Do them during times when you have the most energy.

**Put items in reach.** Put things that you use most often within easy reach.

**Ask for help.** Ask your family or friends to help with the things you find tiring or too hard to do. Their support might help you cope better with your fatigue.

## Lowering your stress

**Try yoga, Qigong, meditation, or mindfulness and relaxation exercises.** These exercises might lower your stress. If you want help getting started, check with your cancer care team for resources.

**Consider counseling.** Counseling, either on your own or in a group, can help you find ways to cope with your cancer, symptoms, and side effects.

**Try massage or touch therapy.** These therapies have helped some people with

cancer lower their stress levels and sleep better. Talk to your cancer care team before starting massage therapy.

**Join a support group.** This could help you share your concerns and learn how others have coped. Ask your cancer care team about support groups in person or online.

### Trying to get good sleep

**Try to sleep 7 to 8 hours each night.** Regular bed and wake times along with a sleep routine might help.

**Take only short naps or rest breaks.** Try to limit your naps and rest breaks to less than 30 minutes during the day. Longer naps can make it harder to go to sleep at night.

**Exercise, but not right before bed.** Try to exercise at least 30 minutes a day but at least 2 hours before bedtime. Choose a time of day when you have enough energy to be active.

**Avoid caffeine before bed.** Avoid caffeine at least 4 hours before bedtime.

### Eating well

**Eat a balanced diet.** Try to eat a diet that includes protein, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

**Stay hydrated.** Drink fluids throughout the day to stay hydrated.

**Meet with a registered dietician.** Ask your cancer care team about meeting with a registered dietician if you are having trouble eating. They can check to see if you are getting the calories and nutrients you need to keep your energy up.

### When to call your health care team

Call your health care team or cancer care team if:

- You feel too tired to get out of bed for a 24-hour period.
- You have problems waking up.
- You have problems catching your breath when you are active.
- Your fatigue seems to be getting worse.

These may be signs of other problems that need to be treated.

## When to go to the emergency room or call 911

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if:

- You feel confused, dizzy, lose your balance, or fall.
- You feel short of breath even when resting.

### [Cancer Survivors Network](#)

An online community where people with cancer, survivors, and caregivers can connect with others 24/7.

### [Cancer Help](#) <sup>7</sup>

Contact the ACS cancer helpline to get answers and information

### [MHA - Mental Health America](#)

Find a counselor or mental health provider.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts/anemia.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts/anemia.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/sleep-problems.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/sleep-problems.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/about-us/what-we-do/providing-support.html](http://www.cancer.org/about-us/what-we-do/providing-support.html)

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