

CANCER FATIGUE

LIVE BETTER



Peter Mac
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Victoria Australia

Fatigue is common during and after cancer treatment. It can be caused by cancer, cancer treatments or other reasons. Fatigue can happen to anyone but it may be prevented or reduced.

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness, or lack of energy. Unlike everyday tiredness, fatigue in cancer is a different experience:

- sleep is not so refreshing
- your body feels different
- your thinking may be affected
- and things are more difficult to do.

Cancer fatigue levels can change over the day or week.

Can anything be done to help fatigue?

Yes, there are things that can help but first you need to know the different levels of fatigue.

Fatigue can be mild, moderate or severe

Mild

- You feel a bit more tired than usual but can still do everything you need to.

Moderate

- Fatigue is noticeable and upsetting. You do less daily physical activities and work may be affected.

Severe

- You are very tired every day. You often feel a need to sit or rest, and may feel puffed. Doing daily tasks is very difficult and exercise does not seem possible.

Who is most at risk of higher fatigue?

People who have:

- Fatigue before starting treatment
- Depression or sleep problems
- Multiple or long term health problems
- Low physical activity or fitness

Keeping track of your fatigue

How do you feel now? Mark your fatigue level in the box below. Use this to track how you are going.

Rate your fatigue levels every day or week.

If your fatigue is getting worse, tell your health team.

Date	Mild	Moderate	Severe

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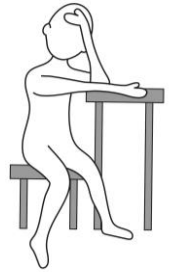
Who can help with fatigue?

- Your cancer doctor or nurse
- Your GP
- Your hospital allied health team
 - Physiotherapist or exercise physiologist
 - Occupational therapist
 - Clinical psychologist
 - Social worker
 - Dietitian

What can you do to lower fatigue?

Many health conditions can cause fatigue.

- See your GP to check health conditions that may add to your fatigue:
 - Pain, low mood (depression), stress (anxiety) and sleep problems
 - Medications that cause drowsiness
 - Infections, viruses or low red blood cells
 - Dehydration (not enough water)
 - Other health conditions – e.g. of heart, lungs, digestion, nervous system



Moderate fatigue

Ways to reduce moderate fatigue and its impact:

- Ask a health professional for help with your tiredness.
Check for other conditions you may have that also cause fatigue.
- Learn to work with the energy you have. Do not push yourself to exhaustion.

Increase your energy (see Mild)

Many people find an individual or group exercise or support program helps.

Mild or no fatigue

Ways to prevent fatigue getting worse:



Increase your energy supply

- Physical activity such as housework and exercise helps to reduce or prevent fatigue.
 - Start with what you can easily do.
 - If you have not been active, ask your doctor for an exercise referral.
 - Slowly increase the time and effort of exercise so you feel a bit puffed. Work slowly towards a goal of 30 minutes a day.
- Eat foods that have energy and protein.
- Keep doing your usual activities, as much as you can without getting too tired.

Severe fatigue

Ways to reduce the effects of fatigue and do everyday tasks:



- See your GP to check for health conditions that may add to your fatigue.
- See an occupational therapist for help managing day to day.

Use energy saving methods

- Do things more slowly, for shorter times.
- Plan your day to include rest and activity.

Increase your energy

- Eat high energy snacks and foods.
- An exercise specialist can help you build your strength and energy.



Important contacts

For Peter Mac programs or if you have any concerns about your fatigue, contact us on 8559 5000 and ask for your nurse consultant:

- Monday to Friday
- 8:00am to 4:30pm

For more information about Peter Mac services please visit www.petermac.org