CANCER MIND CARE

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Fatigue

Topics covered on this page

- What is fatigue?
- What is your level of fatigue?
- What can you do to lower your fatigue?
- Further information and support services

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 e.g. concentration, memory, planning
- Everyday tasks may be more difficult to do
- These effects can cause you frustration, despair and worry.

Fatigue is common during and after cancer surgery, treatments and medications. It can happen to anyone, but it may be reduced or prevented.

You can watch this video to learn more about cancer-related fatigue.

Who is most at risk of higher fatigue?

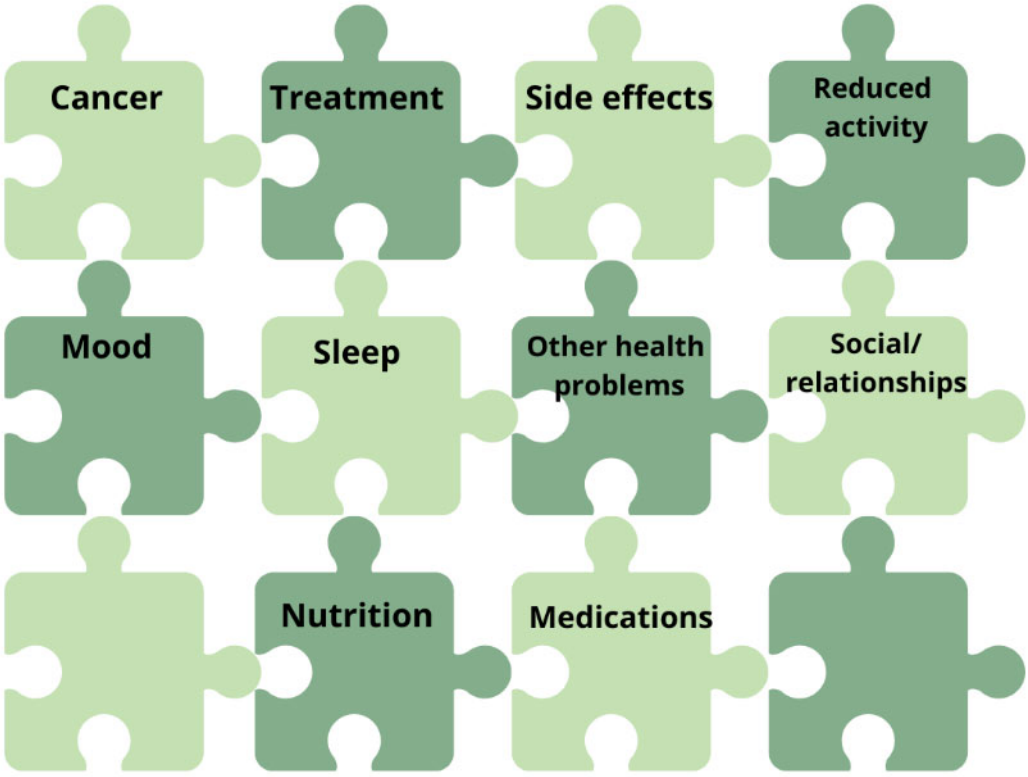
People who have:

- Fatigue before starting treatment
- Depression or sleep problems

- Multiple or long-term health problems
- Low physical activity or fitness

What causes cancer fatigue?

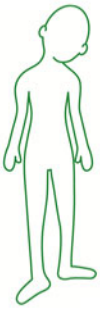
Fatigue can be caused by cancer, cancer treatments, medications or other reasons.



What is your level of fatigue?

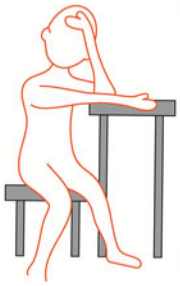
Fatigue is not the same all the time and can change over the day or week.

Rate your current level of fatigue:



Mild fatigue

- You feel a bit more tired than usual
- **You can do everything you need to**



Moderate fatigue

- Fatigue is **noticeable and upsetting**
- You do less daily physical activities
- Work may be affected

Severe fatigue

- You are very tired everyday
- You **often feel a need to sit or rest**
- **Doing daily tasks is very difficult**
- Exercise does not seem possible

What can you do to lower your fatigue?

Mild or no fatigue - Ways to prevent fatigue getting worse

Increase your energy supply by:

- Doing physical activity such as housework and exercise as it may help to reduce or prevent fatigue.
    - Start with what you can easily do. If you have not been active previously, ask your doctor for an exercise referral to a Physiotherapist and or Exercise Physiologist
    - Find a form of exercise you enjoy – walking/ swimming/ walking in water/ riding a bike,

moving to music, Tai Chi
    - Pace yourself!
    - Slowly increase the time and intensity of exercise so you feel a bit puffed
    - Start with 5 minutes and increase slowly by 5 minutes each day towards a goal of 30 minutes a day.

- Keep doing your usual activities, as much as you can without getting too tired and taking breaks. For example, if you are cleaning – clean one room at a time and return to complete the next area after you have had sufficient rest (replenish your energy)
- Eat foods that have good energy and protein.
- Cut up your ingredients for dinner, have a rest and then return to cook the food
- If you are mowing the lawn, do one section or area at a time. It is about planning and managing your energy level.

View this video resource for more information: Doc Mike Evans – a short cancer fatigue overview video

Moderate fatigue - Ways to reduce its impact

- Ask your General Practitioner or cancer clinician for help with your tiredness
- Check for other conditions you may have that can also cause fatigue
- Learn to work with the energy you have
- Do not push yourself to exhaustion

Increase your energy:

- Many people find an individual or group exercises or support program helps
- Sometimes you will become more motivated to participate in exercise if you are with others. For example, walking to the local café/park/beach with a support person, walking groups, or scheduled exercise classes

View the video resources listed below for more information:

- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre – Session on managing cancer-related fatigue
- Alberta Health Services – Living well with cancer-related fatigue
- Alberta Health Services – Exercise for cancer-related fatigue
- University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center – Nutrition for cancer fatigue
- Alberta Health Services – Pacing yourself with cancer-related fatigue

Severe fatigue - Ways to reduce the effects and do everyday tasks

- See your General Practitioner to check for health conditions that may add to your fatigue
- See an occupational therapist for help managing day-to-day activities
- See a psychologist to manage the mental and emotional aspects of fatigue

Use energy saving methods:

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

Increase your energy:

- A dietitian can help you to improve your nutrition with healthy foods
- An exercise specialist can help you to build your strength and energy with an exercise program

View this video resource for more information: Mayo Clinic – 9 ways to manager your cancer fatigue

Speak to your General Practitioner

Many health conditions can cause or add to fatigue. See your GP to check health conditions that may add to your fatigue:

- Ongoing pain, low mood (depression), stress (anxiety) and sleep problems
- Taking medications that cause drowsiness
- Having infections, viruses or low red blood cells
- Dehydration (not drinking enough water)
- Other health conditions

Further information and support services

Further information

Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre - Dealing with cancer-related fatigue fact sheet
Download Guide

Cancer Council Victoria - Fatigue and cancer information
Visit Website

Finding a mental health professional

You can begin by speaking to your General Practitioner (GP). GPs can discuss your emotional concerns with you and can link you to supports in the local community, such as a psychologist or social worker.

You can also speak to your cancer clinician. Most cancer services have a range of psychological support options including psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurses and psychiatrists. If this isn't available at your local health service, ask them what support is available in the local community.

You can find a local Psychologist with a referral or a mental health care plan from your GP.

Search for a local Psychologist
Visit Website

Search for a local Psychiatrist
Visit Website

Health Direct

Health Direct provides information about what a mental health care plan is and how you can work with your GP to access a mental health care plan.

Visit Website

Online self-help programs and smartphone apps

Untire app

Untire gives you the tools to reduce cancer fatigue and get back to living life.

Visit Website

Podcasts

Cancer Council podcast - Managing Cancer Fatigue
Visit Website

Relaxation and mindfulness

Cancer Council NSW – Finding calm during cancer

Meditation and relaxation practices

Visit Website

Headspace

Meditation and mindfulness app

Visit Website

Smiling Mind

Web and app-based meditation program

Visit Website

Cancer support services

Cancer Council Victoria

A non-profit cancer charity organisation involved in cancer research, patient support, cancer prevention and advocacy.

Call 13 11 20 to speak with a cancer nurse
Visit Website
Support Groups
Cancer Connect peer support
Online Community

WeCan

A supportive care website

Visit Website

Telephone support services

Beyond Blue

All calls are with a trained mental health professional, and completely confidential. They will only ask you your first name and you can remain completely anonymous.

Phone: 1300 224 636
Visit Website

Lifeline

Lifeline provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis have access to 24-hour crisis support by trained professional

Phone: 13 11 14
Visit Website

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