

# MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

## FATIGUE (*Feeling weak and very tired*)

**These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects that you notice.**

### What does cancer-related fatigue feel like?

- People with cancer-related fatigue have described it as weakness, exhaustion, tiredness, a lack of energy, sleepiness, drowsiness, confusion, and impatience.
- Others have described it as “just don’t feel like myself,” feeling drained after activities like cooking or taking a shower. Some people have trouble with speaking, thinking or making decisions, others say they feel depressed, bored have no motivation and no interest in sex. Some experience trouble concentrating when reading or watching television.
- Other words used to describe cancer treatment-related fatigue are weary, worn out, pooped, low blood, no pep, no energy, a strong desire to stop and rest, lie-down or sleep.
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you have any of these feelings

### Why do I feel so tired?

The cause of cancer treatment-related fatigue is not fully known. It is recognized that chemotherapy can make you tired. Fatigue levels peak between three and five days after chemotherapy treatment, your energy will gradually return but usually not to your normal pre treatment level.

Other things that may add to fatigue include anemia (which is a low red blood cell count), being depressed or in pain, taking certain medicines, or having trouble sleeping can also make you feel tired.

### Make a plan to feel less tired

- Do less, let others help you
- Do activities that are most important first
- Ask others for help
- Take time off your job, or work fewer hours
- Do one activity at a time
- Try easier or shorter versions of activities you enjoy
- Space your activities. Rest in between activities, if you need to

## **Eat and drink well**

- Make healthy foods when you feel well. Freeze them to eat later.
- Try to eat five or six meals during the day to keep up your strength, instead of three big meals.
- Most people need to drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day. Keep a drink with you and take small sips during the day. You may drink water, milk, juice, soup, tea or even wine or beer (in moderate amounts, with your doctor's approval) for your daily fluids.
- If you continue to have trouble with your eating and drinking, ask to see a dietitian

## **Be as active as you can**

- If you are able, try to exercise every day. Even walking 15 to 30 minutes a day can help give you energy.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about other exercises that can help. Stretching, yoga or Tai Chi can help some people.
- Join a support group. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue. You can learn coping hints from others. Your nurse or social worker can put you in touch with a support group in your area.

## **Take time to rest**

- Listen to your body. Rest when you feel tired.
- Try to take short naps that are 1 hour or less, during the day.
- Make a bed time routine. Bathing or listening to music before you go to sleep may help you relax.
- Try to sleep at least 8 hours every night.

## **Call your nurse if you:**

- Get dizzy
- Feel a loss of balance when walking
- Feel a loss of balance when getting out of bed or up from a chair
- Fall or hurt yourself
- Have a problem waking up
- Have a problem catching your breath
- Have a sudden increase in fatigue
- If you need help dealing with fatigue

