

# Fatigue management

---

**Following a diagnosis of cancer, this leaflet gives information and advice on how to manage fatigue in order to take part in everyday activities.**

---

## What is fatigue?

Fatigue is when you are feeling extremely tired or have a lack of energy. Fatigue is a common symptom of those with a cancer diagnosis and/or who are going through cancer treatment.

Fatigue can affect everyone differently. However, it can be managed in a number of different ways.



## Causes of fatigue

The cancer itself could be the main source of fatigue, as some types affect hormone levels in the body, which in turn has side effects. Those in the more advanced stages of cancer may suffer more than those in earlier stages. Some cancers also make substances or proteins in the blood that can increase tiredness.

Cancer treatment could also cause fatigue as it can affect the production of red blood cells that carry the oxygen around the body. Oxygen from the blood is required for our muscles to work effectively; therefore a lack of oxygen to the muscles will result in a feeling of fatigue.

## Effects of fatigue

Fatigue can affect your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. It can be very frustrating and it is important that you manage it as best you can, as it can also impact on everyday living and participation in activities. Fatigue can have affect your self-esteem and your relationships, so it is important to ask for support and to talk about it.

## Symptoms of fatigue:

- Difficulty with simple tasks such as washing and dressing, cooking, cleaning etc.
- Feeling you have no energy or strength.
- Not wanting to get up in the morning – wanting to stay in bed all day.
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering things.
- Difficulty thinking, speaking or making decisions.
- Feeling breathless after light activity, e.g. having a shower or washing up dishes.
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Losing interest in enjoyable activities.
- Feeling low in mood and more emotional than usual.

- How long does it last?
- Fatigue can be different for everyone and there is no definitive answer in how long it will last for you. For some people fatigue will begin to get better when treatment is finished. For others it may take a few months after treatment. And in some cases it can last a lot longer. However, it is important to find a way to manage your fatigue that suits you.

## Managing fatigue

- **Keep active:** Doing a little exercise can improve energy levels and improve your sleep. Being too inactive can cause muscles to get weaker, which in turn will make you feel more fatigued.
- **Eating a healthy balanced diet:** In order to regain or maintain strength it is important to eat well – meaning eating enough and/or choosing a healthy diet. You might also find after eating certain foods you may feel more energised. Try to keep track so you know what foods give you more energy. Making sure you drink enough fluids is also important.
- **Sleep:** Having a good night's sleep will support you in the day. Ensure you follow a good routine to help with this. Make sure that if you are going to rest during the day it doesn't affect your sleep at night as this will likely increase levels of fatigue during the day.
- **Fatigue diary:** Keeping a fatigue diary will help you to identify patterns on how your energy levels changes. It can highlight activities that make you feel better or worse.
- **Every day activities:**
  - Plan ahead – plan tasks for throughout the day and take short rests.
  - Plan around treatment – try not to do anything too strenuous 24 hours before and after treatment.
  - Do things seated rather than standing – e.g. chopping food, ironing, washing up.
  - Sit down at the sink to have a wash – you don't need a stand up shower every day.
  - Have a bath or, if possible, sit in shower.
  - Online shopping – ask family / friends to get items for you.
  - Prepare meals in bulk / ready meals – freeze them to avoiding cooking each day.
  - Ask for help – everyone needs support sometimes!

For more information please speak with the therapists on Adelaide Ward or visit:  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/physically/fatigue/what-is-cancer-fatigue](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/physically/fatigue/what-is-cancer-fatigue)  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/tiredness](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/tiredness)

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Occupational Therapy Department, December 2023  
Next review due: December 2025