



Managing cancer-related fatigue

Cancer-related fatigue is completely draining. It is unlike any other kind of tiredness you might have experienced before. It is not relieved by rest, sleep, or caffeine.

It is thought to be caused by a combination of different physical, emotional and psychological factors which come together in a unique way at a time when you are at your lowest ebb.

Cancer-related fatigue is thought to also be linked to:

- » The anxiety and strain of the cancer diagnosis
- » Worry for the future
- » Changes in your usual daily routines
- » The side effects of an anaesthetic and bowel surgery
- » Coping with pain and discomfort
- » Dehydration
- » Infection
- » Poor or interrupted sleeping patterns
- » Side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy
- » Side effects of some medicines

Fatigue

Food preparation can be challenging if you are very fatigued. Try choosing healthier ready meals, pre-prepared salads, or cooking large dishes occasionally and freezing them in meal-sized portions. Ask someone to help with shopping or order online groceries if you can.

Using food and fluids to combat cancer-related fatigue

A balanced intake of food and fluids can help to relieve some of the symptoms of cancer-related fatigue by:

- » **Setting new routines for eating and drinking to work with your body's changing energy levels**
- » **Giving you the energy to remain gently active throughout the day, and resting at regular intervals**
- » **Avoiding dehydration and unintended weight loss**
- » **Supporting the balance of hormones for your moods and emotions**
- » **Reducing the risks of developing anaemia (caused by low levels of healthy red blood cells)**
- » **Promoting and maintaining a strong immune system**
- » **Ensuring a good supply of essential proteins, vitamins and minerals for healing**

If you have any concerns about your health or wellbeing during your bowel cancer journey, you can speak to your GP or your specialist hospital team.



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Tips for coping with fatigue

- 1** Include a portion of good quality, **high protein foods** in every meal such as fish, chicken, tofu, or beans with wholegrains to support healing and growth as you recover from your treatment
- 2** Eat and drink as wide a **variety of fresh food and fluids** as possible to ensure the right balance of all the nutrients you need
- 3** Include a **variety of different vegetables and fruits** in your menu planning. Ask others to help you achieve this, particularly if you are feeling unwell after each new stage of treatment
- 4** **Keep portion sizes small** and eat 5-6 smaller meals or snacks a day, rather than fewer, larger meals. This will help to keep your energy levels steady and help avoid you feeling hungry
- 5** Boost your **iron intake**. Good sources of iron include red meat, beans, dried apricots, green vegetables, fortified cereals and wholegrains

tips



Tips for coping with fatigue

- 6** Boost your energy levels and your appetite by **staying active** and focused on activities you enjoy – even if it is only for a short period of time each day. Get out of the house every day too if you can, for a change of scenery and some fresh air
- 7** **Balance** periods of activity with periods of rest and avoid getting over-tired or stressed
- 8** Keep to a **regular bed time** routine
- 9** Eat a light snack and enjoy a decaffeinated or milky drink, or herbal tea, **before bed** to reduce the chance of waking up hungry or thirsty in the night
- 10** Take any prescribed **painkillers** just before going to sleep if you find that you tend to wake in the night with pain



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