

Hints on How to Combat Fatigue

ASSESSMENT

- ◆ Think about your personal energy stores as a "bank". Deposits and withdrawals have to be made over the course of the day or the week to ensure a balance between energy conservation, restoration and expenditure.
- ◆ Keep a diary for one week to identify the time of day when you are either most fatigued or have the most energy. Note what you think may be the contributing factors.
- ◆ Be alert to the warning signs of impending fatigue: tired eyes, tired legs, whole-body tiredness, stiff shoulders, decreased energy or a lack of energy, inability to concentrate, weakness or malaise, boredom or lack of motivation, sleepiness, increased irritability, nervousness, anxiety or impatience.

ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE PATTERNS

- ◆ Identify which activities or situations make your fatigue worse or better and develop a plan to pace yourself. Schedule activities according to your fatigue and energy patterns, scheduling them ahead of time during the day and throughout the week to avoid becoming unusually tired.
- ◆ Plan adequate rest and sleep periods so you can recover your energy before undertaking more activities.
- ◆ Select the activities that are more important for you or that give you the most pleasure and do these activities first. Let the others go or delegate them to others.
- ◆ Try to feel less guilty about restructuring your life to do what is most important for you and what gives you the most pleasure.
- ◆ Reduce unnecessary energy expenditure by using special equipment or by placing equipment and supplies within easy reach. Physical therapy can help for bed and strengthening exercises using overhead trapezes, walkers and canes and with stair-climbing instruction.
- ◆ Occupational therapy can help with equipment and energy-conserving activities. The American Cancer Society can help with transportation and supplies.
- ◆ Begin to cultivate the fine art of delegating.
- ◆ Stick to some form of individually tailored exercise program approved by your physician, nurse or physical therapist. Walking is an activity that most people can do at certain times during their illness.
- ◆ Avoid exercising during the 24 hours immediately before and after your treatments. Also avoid exercise if you are running a fever, have low blood counts or if your bones are involved with disease. In such cases, consult your physician.

SYMPTOM PATTERNS

- ◆ Monitor the effectiveness of medications and other strategies used to control other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, pain and lack of sleep. Could these symptoms and/or their treatments be affecting your fatigue patterns?
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NUTRITIONAL PATTERNS

- ◆ Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of liquids a day to maintain hydration and to eliminate the waste products of treatment that may be associated with fatigue.
- ◆ Eat a balanced diet emphasizing complex carbohydrates (grains and vegetables) that give you a substantial source of energy supply.
- ◆ Get dietary counseling, help with food preparations and shopping or Meals on Wheels to maximize and conserve your energy and to prevent your fatigue from becoming unusual, excessive or chronic.

DISTRACTION

- ◆ Use distraction techniques to focus on things other than fatigue, disease or treatment. Listen to music, visit with friends, watch television or go for walks.
- ◆ Focus on activities that can improve your emotional energy. These usually involve a change in routine to avoid boredom and doing things that catch your interest easily and are enjoyable. Try appreciating nature, doing something creative such as drawing, writing, or pursuing a hobby or doing something socially with people you enjoy being with.
- ◆ Contract with yourself to do these types of activities three times a week for at least 30 minutes at a time. Your mind, heart and spirit need exercising too!

PSYCHOLOGICAL PATTERNS

- ◆ The negative effects of stress can be dissipated in many ways- exercise, progressive relaxation, visual imagery, meditation, prayer, talking with others and therapeutic counseling.
- ◆ Social service agencies can help with referrals to support groups for yourself and family members.

REST AND SLEEP PATTERNS

- ◆ Begin to direct your own activities.
- ◆ Set limits on visitors if you need to or have someone run interference for you when you need to rest and don't want to be disturbed.
- ◆ Sit or lie down often. Short rest periods are better than longer ones.
- ◆ Take naps as needed as long as they don't interfere with your normal sleep patterns.
- ◆ Adhere to or re-establish bedtime rituals that help you fall asleep, stay asleep and enjoy good quality of sleep.
- ◆ Sleep-enhancing aids and sleep medications may be helpful at certain times during your illness and treatment.

What you can do to manage fatigue

- ◆ Tell your doctor or nurse: Fatigue can be a symptom of a medical problem. Your doctor and nurses can help you to make a plan for dealing with your fatigue.
- ◆ Stay as active as you can: Plan some light activity into every day. Many people find that exercise makes them feel more energetic. Exercise keeps your muscles strong and speed your return to normalcy following your treatment. You don't have to run a marathon, start where you can and stick with it! You may be surprised how much better you feel. Walking is an excellent exercise that most people can do, if you need help finding an exercise that's right for you, ask your nurse, doctor or physical therapist.
- ◆ If you are not eating well: Your nurse or nutritionist can give you specific information to help.
- ◆ Try eating more frequent, smaller meals: Low fat foods are best and be sure to get plenty of fluids.
- ◆ If you are not sleeping well: Tell your doctor or nurse. Be sure to mention what you think is keeping you up at night. If your pain or anti-nausea medicine isn't working we want and need to know. Some people find listening to relaxing music or a tape of the ocean or rain helps them to relax and fall asleep.
- ◆ If you are sleeping too much during the daytime: Plan time for both activity and rest in your daily schedule. Try taking short naps instead of long ones. Most people find that a 15-20 min nap is the most refreshing. Set your alarm clock if you need to, get up and try to do something after 20 minutes. If this tires you out and you need to rest, that's okay, but keep trying! Remember, the more time you are inactive, the weaker and more fatigued you can feel. If you need help in working out a routine, let us know!
- ◆ Keep a diary of how you feel each day: Keeping track of your periods of activity and rest can help you to learn the pattern of when you feel your worse and best. Then plan activities when you know you will have the least fatigue. Ask your nurse to give you a diary.
- ◆ Ask for help: Remember, you don't have to do everything. Accept offers. Ask for specific favors such as shopping or cooking. Be sure to save time and energy to do something that you enjoy or that is most important to you.
- ◆ If you are forgetful: Write things down. Bring lists of questions with you when you see the doctor. Keep a list of things you need to get done and that friends can do to help.
- ◆ If you are feeling stressed: Join a support group. Meditation and relaxation techniques may be helpful. Ask your nurse to show you how.
- ◆ If you are feeling depressed: Ask your doctor to recommend a social worker or therapist.
- ◆ If you need compassion: Ask for it. Friends and family may not know you would like visitors.
- ◆ Ask your doctor if there could be a medical cause of your fatigue: Anemia is a common problem. Low blood sugar, low blood pressure and infection are others.
- ◆ Ask your doctor about treatment: If fatigue is reducing your quality of life, ask if there is an appropriate treatment available to help you.