

Fatigue management



What is **fatigue**?

Fatigue is “a persistent, subjective feeling of tiredness or lack of energy related to advanced or chronic illness”, according to the Palliative Care Guidelines 2015.

Fatigue is a symptom that differs from person to person. Evidence shows that between 70-80% of people with cancer/long term conditions report fatigue as one of their most challenging symptoms. However, research also shows that it is an under-identified symptom.

Fatigue is multidimensional and can affect **physical function, cognitive ability, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.**

Fatigue can affect:

1. What we think – e.g. “I feel useless” or “ I can’t do anything”.
2. How we feel – e.g. frustrated, unable to cope, irritable.
3. What we do – e.g. avoiding activities or increased effort.

Possible causes of fatigue

There are many possible causes of fatigue:

- The disease/illness itself
- Treatments (e.g.chemo/ radiotherapy)
- Side effects of medications
- Symptoms such as pain
- Stress or anxiety
- Infection
- Anaemia
- Poor nutrition/hydration
- Poor sleep
- Physical deconditioning

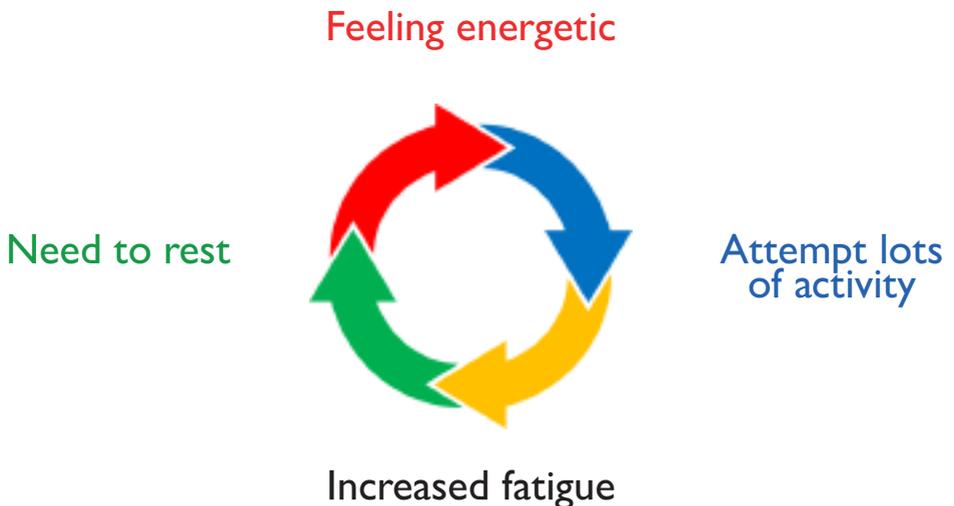
Recognition of fatigue

In order to cope with fatigue, you must first be able to recognise it. Completing a fatigue diary can be useful to log your fatigue. It can be helpful to analyse your activity, and identify any possible patterns or triggers, as well as relieving factors.

Being self-aware and reflective of your own needs is important. Please advise your Occupational Therapist if you would like a fatigue diary to complete.

Managing fatigue and breaking a vicious circle

It can be easy to fall into a cycle of poor fatigue management. It is very common that when you feel you are having a 'good day' with more energy you want to achieve more activities. However, this creates a roller coaster of ups and downs in energy levels making it difficult to be consistent in your approach to daily tasks.



Fatigue management uses strategies to break this cycle and create a more consistent level of energy to enable you to engage in daily tasks.

Management strategies: The 5 P's

Learning to manage your own fatigue will require an individual and committed approach. It will require consideration and/or modification of your daily activities to conserve energy. Often it takes trial and error to work out what is best for you.

Below are 5 key strategies that you could consider implementing:

1. Prioritise

- What do **you** need or want to do? What are **your** goals?
- Prioritise jobs in order of importance - try writing lists for the week/day and number the tasks in order of importance to you and allocate accordingly
- **D**ump it, **D**elay it, **D**elegate it, **D**o it
- Utilise your support network when delegating

2. Plan

- Consider your best time of day – when do you have the most energy?
- Alternate light and heavy tasks, include time to rest
- Plan ahead of the task to ensure all items to hand
- Try using a diary – also can be a useful visual aid
- Have you got the right equipment in place to make the task easier?

3. Pacing

- Remember the story of the hare and the tortoise?
- Break down the task into manageable pieces
- Aim to keep a balance, and avoid over-activity and prolonged periods of rest
- Avoid rushing – keep a moderate, sustainable pace
- Stop and rest **before** you get tired
- Remember the 20% rule - aim to not let your 'battery' run below 20% as you may need this energy for an emergency. The further you empty your battery, the longer it will take to re-charge.

4. Positioning

Sometimes small simple changes to a home space or work place can make it a more energy efficient environment. Occupational Therapists (OTs) may recommend a home visit and changes to the home in order to help management of fatigue.

You could also consider how you complete a task to conserve energy:

- Sit rather than stand – try a perching stool
- How is your environment set up? Chair heights? Distances?
- Good posture and alignment, aim for hips higher than knees on seated surfaces to aid ease of standing transfer
- Keep frequently used items nearby or on work surfaces, or position items on nearby shelves
- Carry or hold items close to your body
- Use aids to decrease need to bend or stretch

5. Permission

- To acknowledge your fatigue, listen to your body
- ‘Be kind to yourself’, what allowances would you make for a friend?
- Allow for bad days (but don’t try to fit everything into your good days!)

Physical activity

Keeping active at your own level is important to managing your fatigue. Research shows that exercise can help maintain muscle strength, improve mood and help with sleep. Too little activity and your muscles can decondition. Keeping active within your daily routine may be tasks like showering, climbing the stairs or a structured exercise group.

Often it is more important for people to maintain functional activity within their daily life, but some people may choose to complete chair or bed based exercises to improve movement and muscle strength.

It is important to be aware of your limitations so you don’t deplete your energy resources too much. We recommend you to talk to your therapy or medical team prior to starting additional exercises to ensure they are best suited to you.

Relaxation or talking therapies

As part of managing psychological fatigue, it can be useful to consider relaxation strategies or talking therapies. Sometimes it can be helpful to find strategies to cope with your stress or anxiety.

Occupational therapists can help you with relaxation strategies or you could consider complementary therapy approaches.

Alternatively, you may wish to consider the emotional wellbeing service at the hospice for support. You can often get tips on how to cope better from talking about your situation, speak with others in similar situations or share your thoughts with health professionals, friends and family members.



Sleep

Good quality sleep can aid fatigue management. Here are some suggestions to promote quality sleep:

- Keep to a regular sleep/wake pattern – going to bed and waking at similar times each day
- Keep to a set routine before going to bed – we are creatures of habit, think about the routine of a new born baby before going to bed
- Avoiding caffeinated drinks before sleep
- Ensure your sleeping conditions are comfortable for you – consider noise, lighting, temperature, positioning in bed and comfort
- Maintain activity/stimulation during the day time as much as possible
- If you need to nap, try to nap early afternoon for 30-45 minutes only
- If symptoms (such as pain) impact on your sleep, talk to your nurse or doctor so see if any medication may help with this
- If you struggle to get to sleep because of active mind, try relaxation techniques or write down your thoughts/worries on a notepad on your bedside table to ‘offload’ - the hospice has an emotional wellbeing service which can help.

For further information, please contact a member of the hospice therapy team via the hospice OneCall helpline on **0800 5670 111**.