

# Feeling Tired From Cancer Treatment



Feeling tired is a common side effect of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and radiation. Also, people who have surgery usually feel tired afterward.

**Other factors can make people feel tired. People might feel tired, weak, or have no energy because:**

- Are sad, worried, or stressed
- Aren't eating enough
- Have trouble sleeping or do not get enough sleep
- Have pain
- Have a condition called anemia, in which their body has too few red blood cells. When a person has too few red blood cells, their body doesn't get all the oxygen it needs

## IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO ON MY OWN SO THAT I DON'T FEEL SO TIRED?

**YES! There are many things you can do so that you don't feel so tired. You can:**

**EXERCISE** - Exercise can increase your energy and help improve your appetite. Try to exercise every day, even if it's just a short walk. Check with your doctor first to make sure it's safe for you to exercise

**YOGA** - Doing gentle yoga with breathing exercises helps many people feel less tired and sleep better at night

**LOWER STRESS** - To help lower the stress in your life, you can:

- Not try to do too much. Instead, ask your family and friends to help you get your chores done
- Take time off from work or work fewer hours, if possible

- Do relaxation exercises or meditate
- Talk with a mental health expert or go to a support group

**SAVE YOUR ENERGY** - To avoid using too much energy, you can change your daily routines and activities. For example, try to plan ahead, rest often, and use devices to help you reach things

- For general and specific tips on ways to save your energy, see the pages 3-5

**SLEEP HABITS** - To improve your sleep habits, try to get at least 8 hours of sleep every night. If you have trouble sleeping, you can do things to improve your sleep habits. **For example, you can:**

- Avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine in the late afternoon or evening
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- Limit your naps during the day, and don't nap more than 30 minutes at a time. For more tips on ways to improve your sleep habits, see page 5

**FLUIDS** - Make sure to eat and drink enough fluids each day. You can also ask your NCS care team about taking a daily vitamin

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## WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY NCS CARE TEAM?

### Call your doctor or nurse if you:

- Feel dizzy or very weak or have trouble breathing
- Are so tired that you can't do your daily activities, including bathing, getting dressed, and eating

## ARE THERE TREATMENTS THAT MIGHT HELP MY SYMPTOMS?

**YES!** There are many things you can do so that you don't feel so tired.

**TREATMENTS FOR ANEMIA** - If you have anemia, Doctors can treat certain kinds of anemia with medicines to help your body make more red blood cells. They can also treat anemia with a procedure called a "blood transfusion." During a blood transfusion, a person gets blood that has been donated by someone else

**MEDICINES CALLED "STIMULANTS"** - These medicines can increase a person's energy. Doctors usually prescribe these medicines only to people who are severely tired and weak

**MEDICINES CALLED "STEROIDS"** - These medicines can increase energy in patients who are severely tired and weak. They are usually used only for a short time because of side effects

**AN HERB CALLED AMERICAN GINSENG** - Taking this herb daily can improve energy levels in people who are tired during cancer treatment. But check with your doctor before starting it. It can interact with a number of other medicines

**MEDICINES TO TREAT DEPRESSION** - In addition to feeling very sad, people with depression often feel tired and don't sleep well at night. If you are depressed, your doctor might prescribe medicines called "antidepressants"

**LOW TESTOSTERONE** - For some men, low levels of the male hormone testosterone can cause tiredness. Some men can be treated with testosterone replacement therapy. Your doctor can talk to you about whether this might be an option

## GENERAL WAYS TO SAVE YOUR ENERGY

### Planning and organizing

- Switch between tasks that take a lot of energy and those that take less energy
- Try to plan ahead so you aren't doing too many things that take a lot of energy every day or week
- Have others help you as much as possible. It helps you get tasks done, and it makes those who want to help feel useful
- Combine chores or errands to lower the number of tasks you need to do
- Arrange your household so most activities can be done on 1 floor
- Organize ahead of time so you don't have to rush

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## GENERAL WAYS TO SAVE YOUR ENERGY

### Pacing

- Get enough rest. Try to rest between activities. You can also stop to rest before you get tired, even if it means stopping in the middle of a task
- Try to avoid bursts of activity, because they can drain your energy
- Follow a routine, and pace your activities on good days as well as bad days

### Positioning

- Sit to do things when possible
- Use assistive devices, like walkers, scooters, canes, handrails, crutches, and grab bars. These help you do things without bending, reaching, or using too much energy
- Avoid heavy lifting (such as children, pots and pans, and laundry)
- Use carts or wagons to move things from 1 place to another
- Wear a fanny pack, carpenter's belt, jacket, or sweater with pockets to carry things

### Prioritizing

- Focus on things you enjoy doing
- Be realistic with yourself

### When you're too tired to eat or shop for groceries

- Let others help prepare or bring food. Family or friends usually like to help
- Shop at less busy times

### Meal Preparation

- Have all of your ingredients ready before you prepare a meal

- Use cookware you can serve from
- Use small, lightweight appliances
- Buy utensils that fit comfortably in your hand
- Store items you use a lot at chest level, so you don't have to bend and reach
- Line ovens and drip pans with foil for easier cleanup
- Let dishes air dry, or use a dishwasher

### Child Care

- Plan activities or outings at places where you can sit or lie down
- Use day care programs
- Have children help with household chores by making a game out of it

### Work

- Plan work around your best times of the day
- Organize work areas so your equipment is within easy reach
- Take rest breaks
- Work part time, if possible

### Leisure

- Plan activities that let you sit or lie down.
- Plan social events for times of the day when you have the most energy

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## SPECIFIC WAYS TO SAVE YOUR ENERGY

### Bathing and grooming

- Wash your hair in the shower instead of over a sink
- Use a terry robe instead of towels to dry off
- Use organizers to keep things within reach
- Use a chair in the shower or tub
- Use a long-handled sponge or brush to reach your back and feet
- Rest your elbows on the counter or dressing table for support
- Use long-handled brushes or combs to avoid holding your arms overhead
- Use liquid soap or soap on a rope
- Use a raised toilet seat

### Dressing

- Wear loose clothes that are easier to put on and take off
- Bring your foot to your knee to put on socks and shoes, so you don't have to bend over
- Wear slip-on shoes or shoes with Velcro closures
- Use a long-handled shoe horn
- Fasten your bra in front, and then turn it around
- Wear clothes that button in front instead of ones that button in back or pull over your head
- Use a reacher or dressing stick to help with zippers in back

### Housework

- Spread tasks out over the week or month
- Hire help

- Use long-handled dusters, mops, or dust pans
- Use an automatic washer and dryer, if possible
- Use a lightweight iron

### Shopping

- Make a list
- Organize your shopping list by store aisle
- Ask for help in stores
- Have your groceries delivered, if possible
- Use canned, frozen, or other prepared foods. You can also order food to be delivered from a restaurant
- On days when you feel well, cook extra food and freeze it in small containers. Reheat the frozen food on days when you're tired
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or social worker about community resources that deliver cooked meals
- Eat small, frequent meals instead of several large meals each day
- Have snack foods readily available
- Put some favorite foods and beverages in a cooler with ice next to you as you rest
- Make quick meals with a microwave or blender

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## TIPS FOR SLEEPING BETTER AT NIGHT

### During the day

- Exercise on a regular basis, even if it's only a 20-minute walk each day. Don't exercise in the evening
- Limit naps if you can. If you must nap, do not nap for more than 30 minutes

### Before bedtime

- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, and nicotine (cigarettes) in the late afternoon and evening
- Limit liquids in the evening before going to bed
- Turn off the TV 1 hour before bedtime. Listen to quiet music, or take a warm bath
- If you worry or "can't turn your brain off" when you try to sleep, write out a list of the things you need to do before you go to bed. Then, try to stop thinking about them

### At bedtime

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends
- A bedtime snack of warm milk, turkey, or a banana might make you sleepy
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex. Do not read, watch TV, or work in the bedroom
- If you are a "clock watcher," turn your clock so you cannot see its face
- To fall asleep, lie in the position that you are normally in when you wake up
- Go to bed at the same time as your partner

### If you can't fall asleep

- If you haven't fallen asleep in 15 minutes, go to another room. Listen to quiet music, or read a calming book. Avoid watching TV or reading an exciting book. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy. If you still can't fall asleep, get up again and repeat as needed

### If you wake up during the night

- If you can't get back to sleep, follow the steps above (under "If you can't fall asleep")

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