



For more information contact your cancer care team at the hospital or call **Cancer Focus Northern Ireland Helpline 0800 783 3339** (Monday - Friday 9.00am to 1.00pm) or email helpline@cancerfocusni.org

Produced by **Cancer Focus Northern Ireland** in partnership with the Multiprofessional Cancer Related Fatigue Forum at **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust** and **Dr Jackie Gracey, University of Ulster School of Health Science**



Belfast Health and Social Care Trust



Cancer Focus Northern Ireland
40-44 Eglantine Avenue
Belfast BT9 6DX

T: 028 9066 3281
E: care@cancerfocusni.org
www.cancerfocusni.org



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Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

**How to Cope
with Tiredness
in Cancer**

Fatigue affects everyone differently and can have many different signs. Primarily, individuals feel excessively tired or exhausted all or most of the time. Cancer related fatigue can be severe and very debilitating because, often, it will not be relieved simply by rest.

Local research shows that the majority of people with cancer suffer from fatigue, making this the most distressing and disabling issue they have to deal with.

One patient commented 'the thing that frustrates me most about being fatigued is the feeling of total exhaustion, not being able to do the normal things, like cooking, climbing stairs, washing and dressing. Basically, I just can't function properly and this is affecting not only me but how I interact with my family and friends.'

What way does fatigue affect everyday life?

It can result in:

- Difficulty in doing the smallest chores
- Feeling as if you could spend the whole day in bed
- Having no strength to do anything
- Difficulties in remembering, thinking, speaking or making decisions
- Being more emotional than usual
- Reduced sex drive



What causes fatigue?

Cancer and its treatments including:

- Surgery
- Radiotherapy
- Chemotherapy
- Hormonal therapy
- Immunotherapy

Other factors that can lead to fatigue include:

- Pain
- Emotional distress
- Sleep disturbance
- Anaemia
- Thyroid disorders
- Medication
- Eating problems
- Reduced activity levels
- Pre-existing medical conditions
- Financial worries



How to Cope with fatigue

Ask a member of your cancer care team to help you identify the cause of your tiredness. It may be helpful to write down any questions and take them to your hospital appointment. Some people take a little longer than others to get over their treatment and everyone is different. Don't be afraid to tell people how you feel so that they are not expecting too much of you.

Prioritising

Plan and pace your activities throughout the day and week: this can help you raise your energy levels and improve quality of life. Make time for activities that you enjoy.

Walking

A slow and progressive walking and strengthening programme will allow your body to rebuild its normal level of fitness and help reduce, and even prevent, fatigue. If you decide to join a walking group, always ask that it is a supervised group and that the walk leader is aware of your cancer diagnosis. It is also important to get advice from the physiotherapy team at your cancer centre before taking up new exercise activity to ensure that it is both safe and suitable for you.

Resting

Try and keep to a normal sleep pattern. If you need a nap, try to take it early in the day. Cut back on stimulants i.e. strong tea, coffee, cola drinks, chocolate and alcohol, especially in the evening. Learning relaxation techniques can help improve the quality of rest.

Eating

Tiredness can cause you to lose interest in your food and therefore eat less. Skipping meals leads to lack of proper nutrition and this can add to the problem with fatigue. Try to eat small regular meals and snacks more often. Drink plenty of liquids and don't be afraid to ask for help with shopping and preparing meals. (See the Cancer Focus NI Well Being Cookbook for hints and tips).