

## Sexual activity

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- Mornings are a time when a lot of people feel more energetic to make love.
- Find positions where you are most relaxed and not holding yourself up.
- Talk to your partner about your feelings or concerns.
- Sometimes a couple needs help in working things out. Your health care team is available to talk with you.

These suggestions have been useful for some patients. What may work for one person may not work for you. You will need to try them out and see which is right for you. It takes time to find a good fit so don't be discouraged if at first you don't succeed. Moving forward is always a step in the right direction regardless of the path.

## Questions to ask your health care team

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- Why do I have so little energy?
- Is it the cancer or my cancer treatment that is making me so tired?

## Looking for more information on this topic?

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You can contact the Canadian Cancer Society at [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) or call the Cancer Information Service of the Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333. You can also contact your local public library for books, videos, magazine articles and online health information. For a list of public libraries in Nova Scotia go to <http://publiclibraries.ns.ca>.

For more information visit *Cancer Care Nova Scotia* website [www.cancercare.ns.ca](http://www.cancercare.ns.ca)

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## Effects of Cancer and Treatment: Fatigue



Cancer and cancer treatments can cause fatigue. Fatigue is experienced by over 75% of people who have cancer. Some people don't feel like getting out of bed, some have no energy to make meals or don't have an appetite, and some feel too tired to get dressed. You can wake up in the morning feeling just as tired as when you went to bed, even when you have had a good night's sleep. However, for some, fatigue is very mild and they continue their daily routine with few problems. We used to believe that pacing yourself, planning activities and getting plenty of rest were the ways to manage fatigue. Now that the symptom of fatigue has been studied more, we know that this is not always true. In fact, too much rest can increase fatigue.

Remember, fatigue is very individual. Some people find ways to manage and live with their fatigue. Others try different things and continue to feel the same amount of fatigue.

**We would like to share some approaches with you that others have found helpful when dealing with fatigue.**

## Exercise

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- Exercise is one of the best ways to manage fatigue.
- Too much rest is not good for the body and may increase fatigue.
- Exercise such as walking builds stamina. It can help increase your appetite and may decrease feelings of fatigue.
  - Walk briskly for 10 minutes. This can increase your energy for up to 2 hours.
  - Start slowly for 2-3 minutes a day. Gradually increase your activity up to a maximum of 30 minutes each day.
- Spending relaxed time in a natural environment has been shown in studies to reduce feelings of fatigue.

Try getting outside near nature such as:

- Sitting on the back step or in the park
- Sitting near or listening to running water in a brook
- Watching the sunset
- Watching the clouds roll by

## Mood

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Fatigue can make you irritable and moody. Some people say that they can't concentrate or learn new things when fatigued.

- Talk to the people around you if you are feeling this way. If you want to be left alone, tell them. Give them some direction so they don't have to guess at how to approach you.
- Don't spend all your time and energy being upset about your fatigue.
- Encourage your family to get involved so they can better understand what you are going through and know that these feelings are common.
- Loss of energy and loss of interest can also be signs of depression. If you feel overwhelmed by sadness or loss of hope, talk to a member of your health care team. If you are depressed, medications, or counselling may be suggested.
- Talk to someone who is a good listener. Find a supportive ear to listen to your frustrations.

## Healthy eating

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- Try to eat healthy foods following Canada's Food Guide. Eat food from all four food groups.
- If you don't have your usual appetite, eat frequent small meals instead of three larger meals. Stay sitting up after meals to encourage digestion.
- Try and eat something healthy for breakfast.
- Try liquid meal replacements (cheapest at larger department stores). Most people find that they taste best when they are really cold. Speak with your health care team if you are having trouble with making or affording meals. They can arrange for a dietitian to meet with you to discuss your concerns.
- Drink fluids during the day (not just coffee, tea, or pop as these dehydrate you).

## Sleep

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- During the day, do not nap for more than 15-20 minutes at a time as this interferes with night time sleep.
- Avoid caffeine especially after supper.
- Try to stick to a normal sleeping routine.

## Temperature

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- You will tire more quickly if you are too hot or too cold.
- Keep yourself at a comfortable room temperature.

## Maintain your social life

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- Try and maintain some kind of social life.
- Do the things that you really want to do that make you happy.

## Pacing your activities

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This may work for some people. You will have to try and see if it works for you.

- Do the most important activities first and then the less important ones.
- Although it is hard to ask for help, allow others to help by giving them tasks you need done (such as laundry, driving you to where you need to go, shopping for groceries, lifting objects).
- Know your limits and listen to your body. Slow down when you are worn out.
- Don't use all your energy in planning.

## Family/Friends

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- Involve your family as much as possible in your care. Ask for help when you need it. Families often feel helpless and useless about what to do. Give them some direction and take advantage of their support.
- Help family and friends understand how you are feeling. It will help if they know that fatigue is a normal part of your illness.
- A family may find a loved one's fatigue very frustrating because they don't understand the person's behaviour. The family may note that, 'They lie around the house all day, and when visitors come they sit right up and act totally normal' or 'They complain about how tired they are feeling and that they can't do anything, but when the doctor asks them how they are doing, they say fine'. A family needs to understand that the person feels most safe and relaxed with people who he/she loves and trusts. The hard work of acting normal can only be done for short periods of time. It is natural to do it with people who are less familiar to you. Some families find it helpful to talk to a member of the health care team about this instead of keeping feelings inside.