



RADIATION ONCOLOGY

Radiation Treatment Fatigue

Feeling tired (fatigue) is a common symptom of cancer patients. Radiation treatment causes fatigue in many patients. Sometimes the fatigue of patients treated with radiation is due to other factors that can be treated. It is important that you talk with your nurse and doctor if you begin feeling tired so they can help you manage your fatigue.

Facts about Fatigue

- Fatigue can be physical: seen as decreased energy to do normal activities.
- Fatigue can be attentional: seen as decreased energy to concentrate or think clearly.
- Fatigue reduces your ability to work or be part of social activities.
- Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of radiation treatment.
- Fatigue from radiation treatment can start as early as the first week of treatment and last for months after the end of treatment.
- Increasing the hours you sleep may not help radiation treatment fatigue.
- Fatigue can be caused by other factors not related to your radiation treatment.

Things You Can Do to Reduce your Fatigue

- Several studies have found that exercise can reduce treatment fatigue. For example, try some light exercise such as walking 10 to 15 minutes.
- One study suggested that doing some favorite things 2 to 3 times a week helps reduce treatment fatigue.
- Muscle relaxation routines have been shown to reduce fatigue. (Ask your nurse about our department's stress release kit.)
- Use energy saving methods to help save your energy for things you want to do. (Ask your nurse for information about ways to save energy.)
- Balance your activity with rest. "Power naps" (less than 1 hour) may help you deal with your radiation treatment fatigue.

Treatable Causes of Fatigue

- Low blood counts - treated with medications or transfusions.
- Low fluid intake and low levels of sodium, magnesium, iron, folic acid, potassium, and other elements - treated with fluids, diet, or supplements.
- Depression - can be helped by support sessions or medications
- Certain medications can cause problems with sleep - can be adjusted.
- Trouble sleeping - sometimes helped by sleeping medications.
- Low blood oxygen levels - treated by wearing oxygen

Signs and Symptoms of Fatigue that should be Reported to your Doctor or Nurse

- Feeling weary or exhausted.
- Less desire to do normal activities like eating or social activities.
- Finding it hard to concentrate or think clearly.
- Not able to do the things you want to do, due to lack of energy.

References:

Ream, E. and Richardson, A. From Theory to Practice: Designing Interventions to Reduce Fatigue in Patients with cancer. *Oncology Nursing Forum*. Vol 26, #8, 1999. pp. 1295-1303

Magnan, M. and Mood, D. The Effects of Health State, Hemoglobin, Global Symptom Distress, Mood Disturbance, and Treatment Site on Fatigue Onset, Duration, and Distress in Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy. *Oncology Nursing Forum*. Vol 30, #2, 2003