

Cancer related fatigue (CRF) information and management

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Introduction:

Cancer related fatigue is more than just feeling tired – it is an overwhelming sense of exhaustion that affects your body, mind, and emotions. It can impact your everyday activities, work, relationships, and leisure activities.

This leaflet aims to help you manage your fatigue so you can do the things that matter most to you.

Understanding your fatigue

Types of fatigue

- Physical: You may feel heaviness in your body, muscle weakness and/or a lack of stamina.
- Cognitive: You may have difficulty concentrating, experience “brain fog,” and find that you have slower thinking.
- Emotional: You may experience irritability, low motivation and feel overwhelmed.

Triggers for fatigue:

- Interrupted or poor-quality sleep
- Overexertion
- Illness or treatment/medication side effects
- Stress or anxiety

Reflection activity:

My fatigue feels like.....
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(Write down in words, use images or any other types of examples that describe your fatigue.)

The 4 Ps of energy conservation

1. **Prioritise** – Focus on what is meaningful to you. Decide what is most important to you today.
2. **Plan** – Spread tasks/activities across the week. Schedule activities that are important to you for when you have the most energy.
3. **Pace** – Take breaks. Break tasks into manageable parts.
4. **Position** – Use energy saving techniques (for example: sitting instead of standing, adapt your environment).

Example of the 4P's:

<u>Task</u>	<u>What can I prioritise?</u>	<u>How can I plan?</u>	<u>How can I pace?</u>	<u>How can I position</u>
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<u>Cooking dinner</u>	I would like to cook a spaghetti bolognese for my family on Saturday	I will do some preparation in the morning i.e chop the veg and keep in the fridge for later. I will consider using a jar of sauce instead of cooking the sauce from scratch	I will rest before I start cooking to maximise my energy levels. I will take breaks while cooking. I will prepare the sauce only, and cook the pasta later just before we eat	I can sit at the kitchen table while preparing the ingredients. I will sit on a stool by the cooker for stirring the food and while checking on the food
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Sleep and rest

- Keep a regular bedtime and wake up time.
- Create a calming bedtime routine.
- Have a warm bath before bedtime
- Limit caffeine, alcohol, and screen time before bed.
- Practice relaxation (deep breathing, mindfulness, gentle stretches).

Movement and exercise

- Regular activity can help reduce fatigue over time.
- Try stretching, walking, or seated exercises.
- Start small and increase gradually.
- Balance activity with rest.

Managing cognitive and emotional fatigue

- Use lists reminders on your phone, alarms, diaries, Post It notes and planners to support your memory.
- Break tasks into smaller steps.
- Allow extra time for concentration and for heavier activities.
- Practice stress management techniques (breathing, meditation, talking to others).

Nutrition and hydration

- Eat small, balanced meals throughout the day.
- Include protein and complex carbohydrates for steady energy.
- Stay hydrated – aim for regular water intake.
- Request referral to a dietitian for advice.

My fatigue management plan

- Alternate heavy and light tasks.

- Keep frequently used items within easy reach
- Accept help or delegate tasks
- Use equipment (e.g. wheeled trolley, shower stool).
- Build in recovery time between activities

Complete the attached worksheets:

- Daily fatigue log
- Weekly planner
- Goal setting worksheet

Daily Fatigue Log - example

Record your activities and fatigue levels on a scale of 0-10, (0 being no fatigue and 10 being overwhelming fatigue), throughout the day.

Date: 28/10/25	Time:	Activity:	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Notes:
Morning	8.30am	Weekly shop	8	I had to stop several times during my shopping. I had to get a taxi home as I was so tired. Next time I will ask my son to drive me and to carry my bags
Afternoon				
Evening				

Night				
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Weekly Planner - example

Plan your activities across the week to spread out your energy use.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	Prepare some ingredients towards dinner Put washing in washing machine	Read my book Do a jigsaw puzzle Watch TV	Cook remainder of dinner Empty washing machine. Ask partner to hang washing up
Tuesday	Sit in garden and do some pruning of plants	Rest	Rest
Wednesday	Meet my friend for a walk and a coffee	Rest	Cook dinner
Thursday	Rest	Walk to local shop and back	Rest
Friday	Rest	Rest	Go to a restaurant for a meal with friends
Saturday	Rest	Go to cinema with partner	Order a takeaway collection

Sunday	Watch grandson play football	Rest	Rest
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Goal-Setting Worksheet - example

Set realistic and meaningful goals to help manage your fatigue.

My Goal	Steps to achieve goal	Support needed	Target date
To watch my grandson play football on a Sunday	Rest on Saturday in preparation Take a seat to sit on to preserve my energy	I will need my son to drive me there and to carry a chair for me to sit on	Next Sunday

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Daily Fatigue Log

Record your activities and fatigue levels on a scale of 0-10, (0 being no fatigue and 10 being overwhelming fatigue), throughout the day. These worksheets are designed to help patients apply fatigue management strategies in daily life.

They can be used independently or with guidance from staff

Date:	Time:	Activity:	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Notes:
Morning				
Afternoon				
Evening				

Night				
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Weekly Planner

Plan your activities across the week to spread out your energy use.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Saturday			
Sunday			

Goal-Setting Worksheet

Set realistic and meaningful goals to help manage your fatigue.

My Goal	Steps to achieve goal	Support needed	Target date

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Energy conservation tips for activities of daily living (ADLs)

Personal care

- When having a wash or brushing teeth at the sink, try and sit down rather than standing
- Keep all toiletries and clothing in one place within easy reach
- Allow plenty of time to wash and dress so you don't have to rush
- Consider using aids such as long-handled easy reach, long-handled sponge and shoehorn to limit bending
- Use bathing aids, such as a bath/shower board to help getting into the bath rather than struggling to get in and out.
- Consider sitting on a stool or chair, where possible, to shower rather than standing.

Shopping/meal preparation

- Consider doing your bigger or heavier shopping by online delivery if you have access to the internet
- Use delivery services such as Wiltshire farm foods/Apetito or companies that deliver fresh ingredients.
- Make a shopping list and a meal planner to organise your shop
- Ask for assistance to carry shopping or to take the trolley to the car
- Allow plenty of time to shop and take a break if needed
- Consider shopping at a quieter time
- Gather everything you need for meal preparation/cooking in advance. Avoid using lots of heavy saucepans and bowls
- If possible, sit down to prepare food
- Use pre-prepared mixes, frozen vegetables, spices
- Batch cook and freeze to use on a day when you are more fatigued
- Freeze left over food for another day
- Where possible use electric appliances such as can openers and mixers/blenders
- Store frequently used items at waist height to reduce bending and lifting
- Take a break between cooking and washing up.

Work activities

- Request a phased return to work if returning after treatment and request your workload is modified
- Plan your day and organise meetings for a time of day you feel less tired
- Write 'To Do' lists to prioritise your work

- Take rests at regular intervals
- Have everything you need during the day within easy reach
- Try to organise your work environment to ensure you maintain good posture. Avoid bending, twisting or reaching.

Sleep hygiene

- Ensure the bedroom is a comfortable temperature
- Try and balance your sleep so you do not sleep for too long periods
- Start a bedtime routine. Going to bed and getting up at the same time every day
- Exercise regularly. This promotes a balance between rest and activity and may assist with sleeping
- Avoid drinking caffeine before going to bed
- Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol before going to bed
- Limit screen time, especially before you go to bed

It is ok to ask for assistance.

Ask for help if you need it and accept help when it is offered. For example:

- If your neighbour/friend offers to drive you to the shops, say yes.
- If your sister offers to cook your dinner, say yes.
- If your cousin offers to do the laundry, say yes.

This will help you to balance your activity and allow you to do the things you really want to do.

This booklet was developed by Cath Woods – Oncology Specialist Occupational Therapist at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre for people living with cancer-related fatigue. It provides general advice only. Always check with your medical team and/or your clinical Nurse specialist for individual guidance and further information.

Further information:

Macmillan Cancer Support:

- Website www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Self-help tips to fight tiredness

- Website www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/self-help-tips-to-fight-fatigue

Royal College of Occupational Therapists

- Website <https://www.rcot.co.uk/learn-about-occupational-therapy/ot-advice/lift-up/energy>

Useful contact details:

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Leaflet information:

You can request this information in a different format or another language;
please speak to your doctor or nurse.

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