

# KATHLEEN KILGOUR CENTRE

Leading Radiation Therapy



**How to manage treatment  
related fatigue**

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## What is treatment related fatigue?

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Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of Radiation Therapy and is often associated with an extreme feeling of tiredness, lack of energy, or total exhaustion which does not improve with sleep/rest. Completing everyday tasks such as working, driving or shopping can be challenging and therefore it is important that you manage your energy levels carefully. The symptoms of fatigue can range from mild to severe and may be experienced during or after (from weeks to months) your Radiation Therapy treatment course.

Fatigue can be confused with tiredness. The key difference between the two is that everyone experiences feeling tired, especially after certain activities or at the end of the day. By having a comfortable night's sleep or by resting, you will notice that your tiredness is usually relieved.

## What are the signs to look out for?

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- A tired feeling that doesn't improve with sleep or rest
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling more tired than usual during or after an activity
- Having no energy or strength
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Finding it hard to do everyday tasks
- Lacking motivation
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Low sex drive

## Factors that may relate to cancer related fatigue

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- Side effects from Radiation Therapy
- Travelling daily to appointments
- Side effects from other cancer related treatments
- Anaemia: this is when there is not enough haemoglobin (a component of red blood cells) to transport oxygen around the body
- Medications: some medications used to treat nausea, pain, depression, and seizures can cause fatigue
- Stress or anxiety
- Changes in activity levels
- Interrupted sleep

## What can I do about fatigue?

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There are a number of things you can do to assist managing treatment related fatigue.

- Be aware of your own warnings signs of fatigue such as low appetite, low mood, difficulty concentrating
- Exercise regularly. Exercise can lessen the feelings of tiredness and lack of energy. It is important to start slowly, allow your body time to adjust, and not overdo it
- If you need time to rest, don't be afraid to say no to visitors
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water
- Talk to family/ whanau and don't be afraid to ask for help
- Speak to your doctor if you are finding it hard to sleep at night

## Tips for saving energy

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- Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to get to places
- Where possible do household tasks sitting down; for example, peeling vegetables or ironing
- Ask family and friends for help with shopping, housework or collecting children from school
- Have plenty of nutritious snacks and drinks in the house, so you can have something quickly and easily whenever you feel like eating
- A 'power nap' during the day of an hour or less can help. Try to have your nap early in the afternoon so your night sleep is unaffected

## Tips for the caregiver/family member

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- Provide help and assistance as required
- Offer to help, don't wait to be asked
- Be understanding if the individual declines a visit
- Offer to go for short walks or provide a gentle exercise routine

## How long will fatigue last?

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Treatment related fatigue may begin to ease once your treatment ends. However, for some patients, feeling fatigued will continue on for weeks or months after the treatment has been completed. It is also common for fatigue to disappear and then return which can be frustrating. It is important to be patient with yourself and to continue to discuss your fatigue with your Radiation Therapy team.