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Cancer Related Fatigue

Most cancer patients experience fatigue during and after their cancer treatments. While the biology of fatigue is unknown, we do know that both cancer and cancer treatments result in fatigue. Fatigue is described as, being tired after a full nights sleep, feeling completely spent: physically, emotionally and mentally. Some patients report “chemo brain”, an inability to concentrate; this is mental fatigue. In order to help with fatigue symptoms we need to evaluate which symptoms you have. You will be asked to answer questions to help us monitor your progress. Listed below are some strategies that have been well studied and proven helpful for many patients.

Exercise – Exercise is one of your most effective tools for battling fatigue. It does not need to include a gym membership, but it can. Start simple, take a walk outside in the yard, then progress to down the street and eventually take a walk around a park or the beach. Go with someone to the market and walk. You can develop your own home exercise program or physical therapy can help you develop one.

Nutrition- It is important to feed your body on a regular basis. It is working hard in helping the chemo fight off your cancer. Your body is repairing itself and killing cancer cells. Help it out. Focus on high protein, low fat and fresh foods; try not to use processed food if possible. Smoothies are very easy to get down, easy to make and loaded with protein. Frequent small meals are often tolerated best. Some people eat small meals as often as every 2 hours. Drink plenty of fluids, 1 liter or more of water a day.

Sleep/rest – Get enough, but not too much. Too much rest can actually make your energy level go down. Daytime naps are fine as long as they do not exceed to 1 hour in duration. If insomnia is a problem please talk with the doctors. Try to get 7 – 9 hours of sleep each night.

Plan Ahead – Spread your activities out over the day and pace yourself to conserve some energy. Moderate the amount of time you spend being active at one time and allow time to rest and recover. A hot shower can sometimes take away your energy, so pace yourself.

Ask for help – There are many tasks that you do each day. Not all of them need to be done by you. Ask others to help you with vacuuming, cooking and other household or daily chores. Save 1 chore that you will do and delegate the rest.

Get Support and reduce stress – Talking with others is a great way to decrease stress. Support groups can fill this need as well as prayer groups, friendship groups and family. Meditation, yoga, massage and relaxation can help reduce stress. Adjust your expectations. If you have a list of 10 things to do today, try to reduce it to 2 -3 things and delegate the rest. Ask the front office for a list of support groups in our area.