

# Fatigue

When Ivy Phillips is able to take a break during the workday, she enjoys walking through the park near her office.

*"They have a lot of nice, defined spaces with beautiful scenery and foliage that I can kind of walk through. It helps me to clear my mind. It helps me to not think about what's going on."*-Ivy, Patient

What's "going on" is Ivy's third battle against cancer. Over her years of treatment, she's learned a lot about coping with side effects. Among them: fatigue. Ivy's walks in the park help keep her energy level up.

*"The movement is good for you. I'm just enjoying the scenery and letting my body do what it does."*-Ivy, Patient

Among all side effects of cancer treatment, fatigue is the most common.

*"I tell every person getting cancer treatment that they're going to have fatigue, that fatigue is inevitable with cancer treatment."*-Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

"Cancer-Related Fatigue" is different from general "tiredness" – in several ways: it can come on without warning; it is not tied to a certain level of activity or exertion; it can be brought on by the most simple tasks; and just "resting" does not usually help.

*"The fatigue related to cancer is like a fatigue that none of us have ever experienced unless we've gone through cancer."*- Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

Sometimes, the cause of cancer-related fatigue is clear. For example: treatment can lead to Anemia, or low red blood cell counts. Red blood cells carry oxygen - so too few mean not enough energy to meet your needs. Certain treatments affect your Thyroid Gland, which controls metabolism – and affects your energy level. And some medications meant to reduce side effects, like nausea, may contribute to fatigue.

*"It's important to mention fatigue to your doctor, because something such as having low thyroid, or anemia, can be treated and can be made better."*- Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

But in many cases the cause is not clear.

*"We like to promote a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, and protein and grains."*

Still there are things you can do to help reduce fatigue. First: good nutrition. Make sure you are taking in enough calories. Cancer treatment often causes you to lose your appetite – so you may need to find creative solutions. Meeting with a nutritionist can help. Also – avoid caffeine: although it perks you up, that boost is short-lived, and

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may be followed by a drop in your energy level. What's more, taking in too much caffeine during the day may interfere with how well you sleep at night. And good sleep is key to coping with cancer-related fatigue. Regular physical activity is important as well. It doesn't have to be vigorous. Simply going for a walk can be beneficial.

*"If you are not active, it makes you tired, so exercise can help with fatigue; it can help with sleep; so, I mean, there is a lot of good that exercise can do for you."*- Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

Track your energy level by keeping a journal. Note when you feel the most fatigued and when you have the most energy. You can then schedule your activities accordingly.

*"If you know for example you're always going to be tired at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, don't plan big meetings at 4 o'clock in the afternoon."*- Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

Try to take short naps or periods of rest throughout the day: 30 minutes or less at a time. But keep in mind that *too much* rest, for too long, can actually make you more tired. Aim to take those breaks before the fatigue hits - getting 'ahead of it,' rather than letting it control you - and your activities. That's what Ivy tries to do.

*"I deal with my fatigue now by managing my time as best as possible. So, I'm getting breaks when I need them, and naps when I need them."*-Ivy, Patient

*"Use your common sense and try to, you know, live a life that will not compound your fatigue. Treating side effects is as important as treating your cancer."*- Dr. Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist