

7. Fatigue, Exhaustion or Extreme Tiredness

Fatigue is the most common symptom among people with cancer, affecting over 70% of patients. It can be overwhelming, distressing and cause massive disruption to a person's normal life. As cancer treatments have become more intense and more demanding, fatigue has become more severe. Both chemotherapy and radiotherapy are known to cause long-term fatigue. Fatigue is also associated with emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and simply the cumulative emotional distress of having cancer. People with cancer often describe their fatigue as: unusual, excessive, a whole body experience, unrelated to how much or little they do, not helped by rest or sleep, and hard to explain. It may be helpful to realise that there are two types of fatigue, **physical fatigue** (e.g. muscle weakness and lack of stamina) and **mental fatigue** (reduced alertness, feeling easily overwhelmed, vulnerable to distraction, etc.)

How can I manage my fatigue?

- It is normal and common to feel exhausted when coping with cancer and the treatment schedule.
- It may take time to learn how to manage your fatigue and work out what best suits you.
- Exercise has been shown through research to be helpful in reducing and preventing fatigue. In fact, physical inactivity among cancer patients may be a significant cause of fatigue. Try to include a little gentle exercise into your daily routine, even if it feels a bit of an effort. Even a short walk once a day may help – *start small and build up slowly*. If this would be difficult for you, ask for advice about devising an exercise plan suitable for you.
- Ensure that you are not stuck in a boom-and-bust cycle, doing too much one day and unable to do anything the next. By planning your day realistically it is possible to conserve energy, e.g. by postponing non-essential tasks, delegating high-energy tasks and scheduling important activities for times of high energy, and only doing as much as you have set out to achieve.
- Consider your sleep/wake pattern. Having a routine where you go to bed and wake up at a certain time can help ensure a good sleep pattern and prevent fatigue symptoms. Try to avoid taking a nap during the day, unless necessary so as not to disturb the sleep/wake cycle. (*See information on Sleep Problems elsewhere in the directory.*)
- Your level of nutrition and hydration will influence your fatigue, so ensure that you have a healthy diet and you drink plenty of fluids throughout the day (2 litres per day). If you have difficulty taking in food as a result of nausea and vomiting you may simply lack energy resources. If you would like additional help with nutrition speak to a dietician. (*See information on Eating and Appetite elsewhere in the directory.*)
- Try using a 'Fatigue Diary' (available from Macmillan – see below). This can be helpful in identifying patterns or triggers for the fatigue that will go some way to helping you to manage your fatigue. For example, if it becomes clear from keeping a diary for a week that you tend to be very active in the morning and then feel exhausted for the rest of the day, pacing and setting smaller more realistic goals would be important.
- Friends and relatives can easily underestimate the effects of fatigue. However, they may be able to give you more practical and emotional support if they understand how debilitating it can be.
- If you have not recently had a blood test to identify possible causes of fatigue, then consider asking your doctor to test you for anaemia and hypothyroidism.
- Stress management techniques such as relaxation training can help prevent 'leakage' of valuable limited energy. In other words, rather than expending energy on worrying or feeling tense, you can preserve it for more useful activities. (*See information on Worry, Fear and Anxiety elsewhere in this directory.*)

If you are in constant pain this can contribute to fatigue. It may be useful to discuss methods of pain control with your doctor. (See information on Pain elsewhere in the directory.)

Consider the effect of prolonged fatigue on your overall mood (See Sadness and Depression).

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact
<p>Marjon 4 Week Exercise Programme - Free 1 hour per week for 4 weeks, programmes runs 4 times a year. Trained fitness professionals to assist and guide you. Try out a range of activities that could include gym, Nordic walking, pilates and home-based exercise programmes. Learn in a friendly, fun group environment</p>	<p>The Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Level 3, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth For more information or to reserve a place, please contact 01752 431468 or email k.hajaree@nhs.net</p> <p>Programme is held at the University of St Mark and St John, Derriford</p>
<p>Yoga with Venita - £7 per session or £65 for a block of 10 Lovely new yoga group where you can make friends, gently stretch your mind and body and allow yourself some special time just for you each week. Classes suitable for men and women of any age, from complete beginners to those looking to reconnect</p>	<p>Morgans Wellbeing in Crownhill, Plymouth – Tuesdays 10.30am – 11.45am Morgans Wellbeing, Unit 66 Christian Mill Business Park, Tamerton Foliot Road, Crownhill, Plymouth, PL6 5DS Contact Venita for more information or to enrol on 07745 521069</p>
<p>Hibiscus Project Gym & Swim - £2.15 Swim & £2.20 Gym Plymouth, £2.10 Tavistock Everyone Active is offering reduced rate swimming sessions and gym session through the Hibiscus Project to all patients affected by cancer</p>	<p>The Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Level 3, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth For more information please contact 01752 431468 or email k.hajaree@nhs.net</p> <p>Held at various sports centres in Plymouth and Tavistock</p>
<p>Walking Football - £2 per session Turn up and play sessions at the Goals Soccer Centre Plymouth, Fridays 11.00am to 12.00pm. No membership required and the session is open to anyone aged 16+ for those with a medical condition/ disability or 50+ without</p>	<p>The Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Level 3, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth For more information please contact 01752 431468 or email k.hajaree@nhs.net</p>
<p>Walking for Health: Step into Nature – Free Walks are free, fun and friendly – perfect to help you get active and meet new people. Walks are graded for different abilities and you can take part in as many walks as you like, as often as you like</p>	<p>Dean Bladgon For more information please contact Dean on: 01752 431638/07919 690630 or email dean.bladgon@nhs.net</p>
<p>Rambling Club Organised within the framework of the national “Ramblers”. We run regular organised walks on Sundays, Wednesday and on Thursday evenings during the summer. Most walks are within a 20 mile radius of Plymouth. Varying grades and distances of walks are provided ranging from easy through to strenuous. Ramblers offer a “try a before you join” policy</p>	<p>Chairman: Peter Major - 01752 893580 Membership Secretary: Steve Whitney – 01752 402204 email: plot8smw@gmail.com Secretary: Val Galer – 01752 700901 For further information or queries, please contact one of the above</p>

Local Resources continued:

<p>Livewell South West: Mindfulness Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life's pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p> <p>Managing Low Mood This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological symptoms of low mood as well as providing strategies to manage this</p> <p>Managing Stress This one hour workshop introduces the symptoms of stress and how the body responds, and provides simple strategies to manage this</p> <p>Sleep Feel, Feel Well Introduces ways to support restful sleep</p>	<p>Livewell South West: To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p>Counselling May help decrease a cancer patients' fatigue by working on problems that are related to cancer that can make fatigue worse. For example: stress from coping with cancer; fear that the cancer may come back; feeling hopeless about fatigue; changes in sleep and activity</p>	<p>The Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Level 3, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth For more information or to reserve a place, please contact 01752 430060 or come in and speak to an Information Officer</p>
<p>Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers</p>	<p>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935</p>
<p>Pauls Place B&B in North Devon for young adults bereaved, life limiting illness or carer. Parents of a child with terminal or life threatening illness, needing fulltime care or have lost a child. The grant from Pauls Place can cover the cost of accommodation for up to a week.</p>	<p>Pauls Place enquiries: Tel: 01271 891076/07793 980760 Applications must be made by a Health Care Professional</p>
<p>Other Resources</p>	<p>Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.</p>

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support – Fatigue</p>	<p>http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Livingwithandaftercancer/Symptomssideeffects/Fatigue/Fatigue.aspx</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.</p>	<p>www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)</p>

Further information:

<p>Macmillan Cancer Support booklets: – available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre</p>	<p>Marie Curie Leaflets: available free from www.mariecurie.org.uk</p>
<p>Coping with fatigue</p>	<p>Managing your fatigue</p>
<p>How are you feeling?</p>	
<p>Understanding chemotherapy</p>	
<p>Understanding radiotherapy</p>	