



THE AUSTIN CENTER  
FOR  
RADIATION ONCOLOGY

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT TREATMENT RELATED FATIGUE**

### **What is treatment-related fatigue?**

It is a feeling of tiredness, often more severe than the tiredness healthy people experience. It is seen in people who have surgery, radiation, chemotherapy or other forms of treatment.

### **How do people describe treatment-related fatigue?**

Individuals have described fatigue as weakness, exhaustion, tiredness, a lack of energy, sleepiness, drowsiness, confusion, or impatience. Others have described fatigues as “just don’t feel like myself”, feeling drained after activities like cooking a meal or taking a shower. Other words used to describe treatment-related fatigue are weary, worn out, pooped, listlessness, no energy, a strong desire to stop and rest, and a strong desire to lie down or sleep.

### **What happens when you experience treatment-related fatigue?**

Fatigue can affect the way you think as well as how you feel. You may need more sleep. You may have trouble paying attention when reading, watching television, even talking with family members. You may find that you are not able to do all the activities you did before treatment.

### **What causes treatment-related fatigue?**

The cause of treatment-related fatigue is not fully known. Problems like low blood count, sleep disruption, stress, and not eating enough, along with other factors, may contribute to fatigue.

### **How do other people cope with treatment-related fatigue?**

Everyone experiences fatigue and treatments differently. You may not feel tired while someone else does, or your fatigue may not last as long as someone else’s does.

Here are some tips to help you cope with fatigue:

- Plan your day so that you have time to rest.
- Take short naps or breaks rather than one, long rest period.
- Eat as well as you can, and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take short walks or do light exercise if possible.
- Try easier or shorter versions of activities you enjoy.
- Try activities that are less strenuous, like listening to music or reading.
- Keep a diary of how you feel each day. This will help you plan your daily activities.
- Join a support group. Sharing your feelings with others can ease the burden of fatigue. You can learn coping hints from talking about your situation. We can put you in touch with a support group in your area.
- Save your energy for the most important things.
- Become comfortable having others do some things that you usually do.
- See what helps you feel less tired, and make those activities a priority for you.

**When is rest *not* the best treatment for treatment-related fatigue?**

You may be advised to “take it easy” and “get plenty of rest”. Sometimes staying in bed over a long time can slow your body down and cause you to feel even more tired.

**What can family or significant others do to help with treatment-related fatigue?**

Do not push yourself to do more than you can do. Ask your family or friends to help you with tasks you find difficult or taxing, like mowing the lawn or grocery shopping. It may be difficult for family members to understand if rest does not make your fatigue go away. Explaining that the fatigue you feel is different from the fatigue you had before treatment may help them understand.

**What symptoms should you report to the doctor?**

Call the doctor if you:

- get dizzy
- feel a loss of balance when walking, getting out of a bed or a chair
- fall or hurt yourself
- have a problem waking up
- have a problem catching your breath
- have a sudden increase in fatigue