

# LOUISE MALONE

## Treatment Related Fatigue

Fatigue or feeling tired during or after cancer treatment is normal (more than 90% of patients report it). Thankfully, there are things that can be done to help! Let's look at what it is, what causes it and what we can do to overcome it.

Treatment related fatigue is more debilitating than normal fatigue. With this type of fatigue, sleep is no longer restorative. We wake feeling exhausted in your body and mind. It can be destructive to our life, affecting us physically and mentally including our work and relationships.

Treatment related fatigue is complex and can have many causes. Commonly there is a relationship between fatigue, treatment, lack of sleep and lack of exercise. During cancer treatment, the medication can affect the good cells (as well as the bad ones) and cause muscle loss leaving us feeling weak. Sleep can be difficult from stress and anxiety with our diagnosis and treatment especially after procedures such as surgery (due to discomfort and/or pain). In addition, we may not be doing our regular exercise regime or normal activities at this time such as gardening, the school run or work, reducing our general fitness levels.

Here are some tips to help us avoid and overcome treatment related fatigue:

**Pacing** is very important during our treatment. I recommend one activity per day. We may have better days/weeks within a treatment cycle, don't be tempted to do more on these days, just enjoy the feeling and save that energy for the next day.

Is good to have a **daily and weekly routine**, not only for the body but also the mind. Try to do the following at the same time each day: wake and get out of bed, meals, naps, and exercises. It is also important to try to keep good sleeping habits (such as preparing for sleep) to help us unwind.

It may sound counterintuitive, but **exercise** can prevent fatigue and give us energy as it strengthens our lungs, heart and muscles. It is important to maintain a level of exercise such as walking (daily) and gentle strength exercise programme (twice weekly). On days where we feel we have less energy, walk slower and shorter distances. During these times, try gentle breathing exercises or stretches instead, but don't give up.

I am a huge fan of **naps!** Taking a little rest or reset during the day can allow us to have a longer evening and feel less tired, enjoying more activities with our friends, family and loved ones.

Be aware of **steroids**. Whilst they are great to manage side effects of treatment (like nausea), they often make us feel like as if we have lots of energy. However, this is 'fake energy' and as soon as you stop taking steroids our energy levels will return to normal or become worse. We may even feel more tired as we have spent energy that we didn't really have. Keeping a routine every day despite treatment or steroids will prevent this.

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If you need support, do not hesitate to reach out to a healthcare professional with appropriate experience, such as an oncology physiotherapist, nurse or your doctors.

(This article is published in the My Cancer Companion App. My Cancer Companion is a free app providing the best, up-to-date and authoritative information for people with lung cancer and pleural mesothelioma).

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