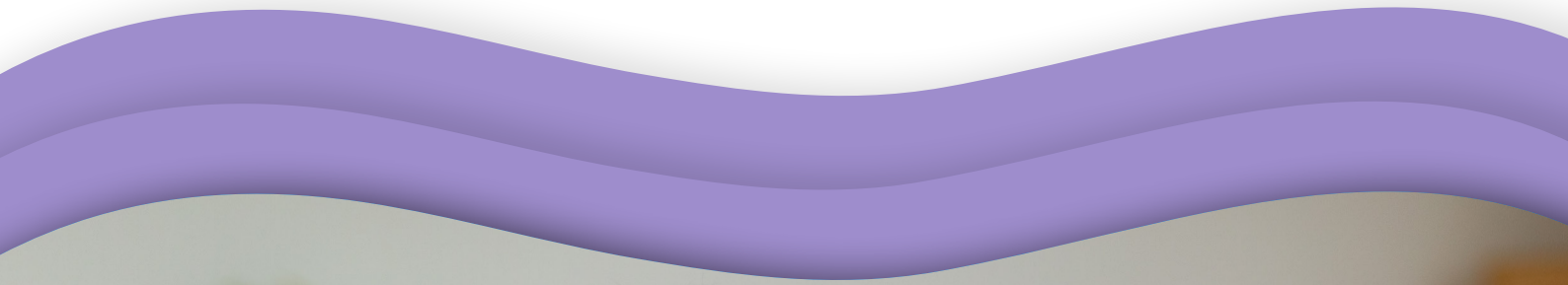




Coping with Fatigue



What is Fatigue

Fatigue is defined as a feeling of lack of energy and motivation, which can be both physical and/or mental. Sleep or rest does not easily relieve it. Fatigue is one of the most common and distressing problems for people with cancer and other chronic illnesses. The causes of fatigue are not fully understood. It may be caused by your disease, its symptoms, or the side effects of treatment.

Effects of Fatigue

Fatigue affects people in different ways. For some people it can be mild and not have much influence on your daily activities or social life. For others it can be severe and have a huge impact on your quality of life. Fatigue can interfere in your relationships with family and friends. It is really important to talk about how it affects you.

Common Effects

- You may have difficulty doing simple things such as washing yourself, brushing your hair or getting dressed.
- You may not be able to concentrate, remember things or make decisions.
- You may lose interest in things you previously enjoyed and avoid going out.
- You may experience difficulty sleeping.
- You may feel low in mood, easily irritated and be more emotional than usual.

How can Physiotherapy Help?

There is good evidence that exercise is a great way to help improve fatigue.

Going for a short walk, doing some simple strengthening exercises or doing some gardening are some ideas to incorporate activity into your day. Pick something you enjoy doing. Make exercise part of your daily routine. It is important to pace yourself and take your time when doing an activity. Beginning with light activity and building this up over time will help improve your fatigue. Keeping track of your exercise through an activity diary and setting short term goals are useful. Use our **Weekly Activity Diary** to record your activities and your fatigue. Please also read our ISCP leaflet **Physical Activity Advice for those Living with and Beyond Cancer**.

Exercise Benefits

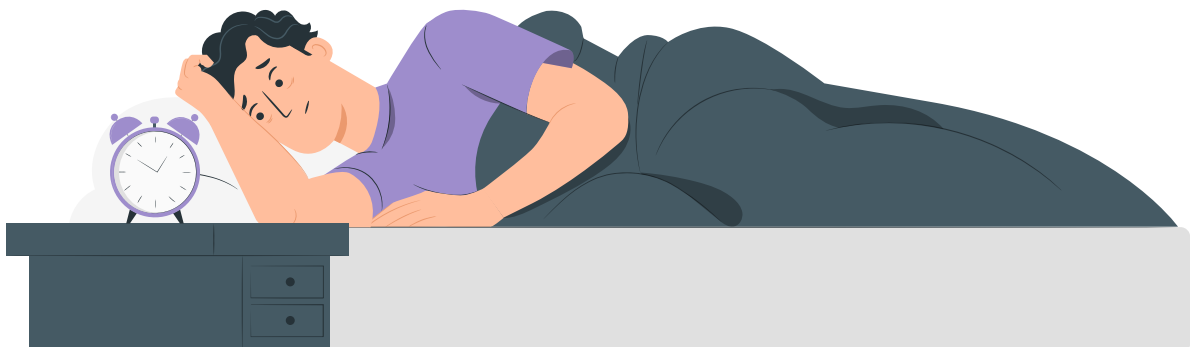
- Maintains and improves your physical abilities.
- Helps to maintain muscle strength and flexibility.
- Releases endorphins to lift mood.
- Prevents your muscles from wasting due to inactivity.
- Stress reduction.
- Improve quality of your sleep.

Exercise Safety

Before you start doing any physical activity or increase the amount you do, it is important to seek advice from a healthcare professional. Do not exercise if you feel unwell, are in pain or have any other symptoms that worry you, such as feeling breathless. Please contact your GP. Your GP can refer you to a Chartered Physiotherapist who can help you with some specific exercises to build up strength and energy. We can advise you on the level of activity that is safe for you to do.

Energy Conservation

Keeping a diary of daily activities and energy levels throughout the day is advised in the management of fatigue. Energy conservation should include planning out your day and prioritizing of activities. You should learn to do the most important things when your energy levels are highest and delegate less important tasks to others. Use your energy for things you enjoy doing. Trying to balance the amount of energy used on your “good days” and “bad days” will help conserve your energy throughout the day.



The Five P's

- 1. Plan** – Try to develop a realistic daily schedule. Break down activities into stages and spread them throughout the day or over a few days. Build in a rest period after an activity.
- 2. Prioritise** – What activities are most important and which are least important? List your activities for the day in order of importance.
- 3. Pacing** – Use the little and often approach. Do a little bit each day rather than all at once. Alternate between heavy and light tasks.
- 4. Positioning** – Try to be conscious of your position and posture during the day. Sit down to do whatever chores you can. Refer yourself to your Community Occupational Therapist for aids and appliances to make activities easier and more efficient.
- 5. Protecting** – Regularly check in with yourself and listen to your body. Give yourself permission to say no to a task and delegate to family or friends.

Sleep and Relaxation

Sleeping well may reduce your feelings of fatigue. Try to maintain a normal sleeping pattern. Short naps during the day are useful as long as they don't interrupt your sleep at night. It makes sense to plan a period of rest after a period of activity. Rest may also involve some relaxation time. Relaxation can help with relieving feelings of stress and tension, which will help increase your energy levels. Here are a few examples of ways to help you relax:

- Massage
- Jacuzzi/Bath
- Deep Breathing
- Yoga/Stretching
- Mindfulness
- Aromatherapy
- Music
- Art
- Reading



Tips for better sleep

- Stick to a regular routine. Go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day.
- Try to do gentle exercise daily. This can help you feel naturally tired and ready for sleep.
- Mental exercises can also help you sleep: Try to remember the lines of a poem or song, make alphabetical lists of girls or boys names, countries, trees or flowers, relive a favourite experience in detail or practice relaxation exercises.
- Get plenty of exposure to natural daylight during the day.
- Limit your bedroom to a sleeping space. Keep it dark and keep electronics out.
- Avoid or limit alcohol, caffeine, nicotine at least three hours before bedtime.
- Sleep just long enough, aim for 7-8 hours at night. Limit naps to 30 mins or less. Try to balance rest with activity.

Top Tips to remember:

1. The Five P's: Plan, Prioritize, Pace, Position, Prioritise, Protect.
2. Keep your energy levels up by eating small frequent meals and keeping hydrated.
3. Remember a little activity no matter how small is better than none.
4. Try to balance rest with activity - sometimes too much rest can cause fatigue.
5. **Be kind to yourself on days when your symptoms are increased.**

Where can I see a Chartered Physiotherapist?

For more details on fatigue management please consult a Chartered Physiotherapist. Physiotherapists work in the community, in hospitals, hospices and in private practice. Treatment may be as an inpatient, outpatient or in your own home. You may need to be seen by a Physiotherapist who specialises in Oncology, Palliative Care, Respiratory or Neurology depending on your illness or stage. Please ask your GP or Consultant to refer you. A Chartered Physiotherapist will continue to liaise with your health care team to ensure continuity of care.

General Information

Chartered Physiotherapists in Oncology and Palliative Care work in hospitals and in the community, where treatment is covered under the public health service and in private practice where treatment costs can be fully or partially reimbursed through your insurance (check your individual policy). Tax relief may be claimed by filling in the Med1 form available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie

Getting Help

When you choose a Chartered Physiotherapist in Oncology or Palliative Care you can have the peace of mind in knowing that you are being treated by a university trained physiotherapist who is committed to the highest standards of ethical and clinical excellence.

The Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists acknowledges and thanks its Interest Group in Oncology and Palliative Care (CPOPC) for developing this leaflet

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