

Managing Fatigue

What is fatigue?

- Tiredness, exhaustion, or lack of energy not relieved by rest
- A condition which impacts your ability to perform your usual or expected activities
- Seen frequently in hospice and palliative care patients
- A complicated symptom which can have many causes including your disease, your emotional state, and your treatments
- Sometimes comes with depressed feelings

What are the signs of fatigue?

- “Just too tired” to perform your normal activities or routines
- Lack of appetite or not having energy to eat
- Sleepiness
- Not talking
- Depression

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team?

- Any signs listed above
- A ranking of your fatigue using a scale that helps the team know how severe the fatigue is: for example,
 - 0 = no fatigue to 10 = in bed all day
- What makes the fatigue better or worse
- Spiritual, social, or emotional concerns and worries
- Changes in appetite
- Any distressing symptoms that are not controlled such as nausea, pain, bowel problems
- If you have experienced fatigue before and what made it better

What can be done to help fatigue?

Because fatigue is a complex problem, it takes a group of actions to help your symptoms. Discuss your fatigue with your healthcare team. The team will work with you and your family to find the causes for the fatigue and discuss treatments best for you.

Things you may do:

- Gradually increase your activity. Do so gradually in order to conserve energy
 - Keep a log of which time of day seems to be your best time
 - Plan, schedule and prioritize activities at optimal times of the day
 - Eliminate or postpone activities that are not your priority
 - Change your position and do not just stay in bed
 - Use sunlight or a light source to cue the body to feel energized
 - Try activities that restore your energy, such as music, or spending time outdoors in nature or meditation
 - Allow caregivers to assist you with daily activities such as eating, moving or bathing if necessary. Plan activities ahead of time
 - Encourage your family to be accepting of your new energy pace
- Rest and sleep better
 - Listen to your body – rest as needed
 - Establish and continue a regular bedtime and awakening
 - Avoid interrupted sleep time and try to get continuous hours of sleep
 - Plan rest times or naps during the day late morning and mid afternoon
 - Avoid sleeping later in the afternoon which could interrupt your night time sleep
 - Ask if using oxygen when you sleep will help you to sleep better
- Increase food intake
 - Try nutritious, high protein food
 - Small frequent meals
 - Add protein supplements to foods or drinks
 - Frequent mouth care (before and after meals)
 - Ask about possible use of medications to stimulate your appetite or relieve fatigue

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

Reference

Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse. 3rd Ed. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2010.

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