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HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MANAGING FATIGUE

Feeling tired, weak or exhausted is one of the most common concerns experienced by hospice patients of all ages and their families. Fatigue may be caused by the person's illness, treatment, medications, emotions, lack of sleep, or poor nutrition. Helping the person cope with their lack of energy can improve their quality of life.

What is fatigue?

- Tiredness, exhaustion, or lack of energy.
- A condition which impacts the ability to perform any activity.
- Seen frequently in hospice and palliative care patients.
- A complicated symptom which can have many causes.
- Sometimes comes with depressed feelings.

What are the signs that a patient is fatigued?

- Unable to perform your normal activities – every person is different in their normal activity level, "just too tired."
- Not participating in the normal routine.
- Lack of appetite – do not have the energy to eat.
- Sleepiness.
- Not talking.
- Depressed.

What to report to the Hospice and Palliative Care team?

- Any of the behaviours listed above.
- Rank your fatigue using a scale – it helps the team be able to find what works for you and how severe the fatigue is: 0 = **no fatigue** to 10 = **in bed all day**.
- What makes the fatigue better or worse.
- Spiritual concerns.
- Changes in appetite.
- Any distressing symptoms that are not controlled.
- Have you experienced fatigue before – and if so what made it better.
- The concerns family/caregivers have about the fatigue.

What can be done to help fatigue?

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

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Things you can do:

- Gradually increase your activity and conserve your energy
 - Plan, schedule and prioritize activities at optimal times of the day.
 - Have your caregiver help you keep a log of which time of the day seems to be your best time.
 - Eliminate or postpone activities that are not your priority
 - Change your position – do not just stay in bed.
 - Use sunlight/light source to cue the body to feel energized.
 - Try activities that restore your energy.
 - Allow caregivers to assist with all daily activities such as eating, moving or bathing and 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 to get continuous hours of sleep.
 - Plan rest times or naps during the day during late morning and mid afternoon.
 - Avoid sleeping later in the day, which could interrupt your night time sleep.
 - Ask your team if using oxygen when you sleep will help you to sleep better.
- Increase food intake.
 - Try nutritious, high protein, nutrient dense food.
 - Small frequent meals.
 - Add protein supplements to foods or drinks.
 - Frequent mouth care (before and after meals).
 - Ask your team about possible use of medications to stimulate your appetite.
- Seek emotional support.
 - Talk about thoughts and feelings about life.
 - Focus on the moment and enjoy it – for the gift that it is.
 - Communicate with family and friends about needs.
- Tell your team about any distressing symptoms that are not in control.
- Ask your team about treatments for depression.