



PATIENT EDUCATION

My Guide to Cancer Symptoms

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HEALTHY LIVING CARING INTERACTION

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PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

How to Use This Guide

The information in this guide describes six cancer symptoms in separate sections. Each section explains beginning steps you can take to help you manage a symptom.

The steps include information about medical therapies, behavioral strategies and integrative therapies. And they discuss physical activity and how to manage your diet. Use what you learn to help manage your symptoms. Be an active member of your care team.

You may need additional information and support to manage your symptoms. Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community. There also are self-directed materials with more information to help you manage each of the six cancer symptoms mentioned in this guide. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting a symptom-specific tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

Take an Active Part in Your Health Care

Cancer, cancer treatments and other medical conditions can cause symptoms. Some of these symptoms are treatment-related, such as nausea, diarrhea, or hot flashes, and are addressed by your oncology team. There are other symptoms, not necessarily treatment-related, that you can help manage.

This information focuses on six common symptoms. With the help of this guide, the following are symptoms you and your loved ones can help manage:

- Fatigue
- Pain
- Anxiety
- Depressed mood
- Weakened physical function
- Trouble sleeping

Cancer affects each person differently. It may feel overwhelming. The good news is there are ways to manage symptoms before, during and after cancer treatment. You can and should be an active member of your own health care team. Use the following information to help you take an active part to manage your symptoms. Your care team is here to help you along the way.

If you have more than one symptom

It is common to have more than one cancer symptom, and they may be related. For example, lack of sleep can cause depression and fatigue. The good thing is, when you treat one symptom, you often reduce other symptoms. For instance, better sleep may lessen both depression and fatigue.

You may need to use different methods to manage symptoms. For instance, you can combine medication with diet changes and integrative therapies. Integrative therapies, such as yoga and acupuncture, use health and wellness practices for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Combining treatments often works for many people. Talk to your cancer care team about your symptoms and treatments that are available at your hospital or clinic.

Do not wait to manage your symptoms

You may think you should wait until after your treatment is done or until after an upcoming surgery to focus on your symptoms. But waiting can lead to more problems.

When to contact your health care provider

Contact your health provider when you have:

- New or worsening numbness and tingling in your legs or arms.
- New or increasing pain.
- Excessive vomiting or inability to maintain adequate fluid intake.
- Burning discomfort when you urinate or new frequent urination in small amounts.
- New loss of bowel or bladder control.
- New loose stools or diarrhea for more than 2 days.
- A temperature of 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or higher if you are on chemotherapy.
- Bleeding or unusual bruising.
- Inability to do your usual daily activities.
- Worsening shortness of breath.
- Severe mental or emotional distress.

Monitor your symptoms

Keep a diary or log of your symptoms. This can help you see patterns with your symptoms, such as what makes them better or worse and when they occur. Knowing those details may help you develop a treatment plan that works for you.

Recording information about a symptom in a diary or log can be helpful when you talk to your care team. Your care team may be able to develop a plan to manage a symptom based on the following information:

- When the symptom started.
- How the symptom improved or became worse.
- What makes the symptom better or worse.
- How the symptom feels at different times of the day.
- How the symptom affects your usual activities.

Make an action plan

Your habits and activities can affect your symptoms. Action plans help you make changes to manage your symptoms. It can be hard to make changes without a plan.

Follow these steps to create an action plan:

1. Choose something you want to do this week. For example, choose to go to bed at a certain time every day. Or choose to exercise every day.
2. Be specific about your action. What will you do? When you will do it? How much or how long will you do it for? For example, "I will go to bed at 8:30 every night this week." Or, "I will go for a 30-minute walk in the morning on Monday, Wednesday and Friday."
3. Rate how confident you are that you will be able to do your plan. Use a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the highest. You will hopefully have a confidence level of 7 or higher. If your confidence level is below 7, you should change your plan to something you feel more confident about.
4. Share your plan with a friend or family member who can support you. Sharing your plan also may make it more likely that you will complete it. Your friend or family member should check in on you during the week to see how your plan is going. If you are struggling with your plan, your friend or family member might have ideas.
5. At the end of the week, report to your friend or family member on how you did with your action plan and make a new plan for the next week.
6. Reward yourself. Sticking to an action plan during or after cancer treatment can be hard work.

How to Manage Fatigue

Fatigue is the most common symptom for people who have cancer. It's often extreme tiredness that does not get better with rest. It affects physical and mental activity.

It can affect your ability to socialize. Even talking may wear you out at times. You also may find it hard to focus. Fatigue can cause frustration because you may not be able to do your normal activities.

Fatigue has a number of causes. It can come from your body working hard to fight cancer and from cancer treatments. It also can come from the following:

- Changes in hormone levels, blood counts and electrolytes.
- Lifestyle changes, including changes in routines.
- Anxiety, depression, pain, and other symptoms.

Note: If you are cancer-free, fatigue does not mean your cancer came back. Many people have fatigue even after they are cancer-free.

Keep a fatigue diary or log. Include the following information:

- When did your fatigue start?
- Has it changed?
- What helps?
- What makes it worse?
- How does your fatigue affect your usual activities or the activities you want to do?

Medical therapies to manage fatigue

Medications may help if there are specific underlying causes of fatigue, such as a hormone imbalance. Before you start a medication, your care team may do tests to try to identify the cause of your fatigue.

Few medications lessen fatigue caused by cancer. However, American ginseng is a plant root that may help. There are many types of ginseng. Before you use ginseng, talk with your care team.

If your fatigue is severe and you do not respond to other treatments, your health care provider may prescribe medication, such as stimulant medication.

Note: You may still have fatigue for some time after you stop taking cancer medication and after other cancer treatments.

Behavior strategies to manage fatigue

The following mental strategies can be some of the most helpful ways to manage fatigue.

- Open window shades and let natural sunlight in.
- Plan your days around periods of fatigue and energy. For instance, if you feel fatigued at a certain time every day, plan what you have to get done and what you want to do before or after that time.
- Save your energy for activities that you need or want to do.
- Set realistic activity goals. Prioritize activities that you must do and that bring you joy.
- Limit naps. If needed, nap for only 20 to 30 minutes in the late morning or early afternoon. Late afternoon and evening naps can affect quality sleep.
- Spend some time outside.
- Use devices that help you save energy. Examples include raised toilet seats, seated walkers and wheelchairs.
- Become aware of “tired” thoughts. Cognitive behavioral therapy, also called CBT, can help you to recognize and lessen negative self-talk that may drive fatigue.

Physical activity to manage fatigue

Physical activity is often the best treatment to manage fatigue. To give yourself more physical energy, exercise every day. Exercise prevents muscle loss and helps to manage fatigue. Ask your oncology care team about exercise programs in your community. Choose activities you enjoy and can easily do.

- Exercise can be as simple as taking a walk around the block. Get outside for your exercise if you can do that safely.
- Aerobic exercise is a great way to reduce cancer-related fatigue. Stick with a regular program. This is more important than how hard or how long you exercise. Aerobic exercise may be walking or using gym equipment, such as an exercise bike. Save energy for daily aerobic exercise.
- Strengthening exercises with weights, bands or even your body weight can also help fight fatigue.
- Start exercising at a low intensity and advance your program slowly. Do small amounts of exercise, such as 5 minutes or less, at different times of the day until you are ready to be active for longer periods.
- Pace yourself. On days when you have more energy, don’t push it. Stick to your routine to help manage your fatigue.
- Yoga, tai chi and Pilates can help fatigue that comes from your cancer.

Integrative therapies to manage fatigue

The following integrative therapies may help you manage fatigue:

- Meditation, which uses breath awareness or the repetition of a soothing phrase to focus and quiet the mind.
- Prayer.
- Stress management.
- Relaxation therapy, guided imagery, art, or music therapy.
- A support group. Support groups can provide suggestions and give reassurance in a safe environment. You can share concerns with other people who struggle with fatigue.

Diet to manage fatigue

- Eat a balanced diet with lots of protein and vegetables.
- Drink lots of water, especially when you are physically active.
- Limit sugar, including sugary drinks.

What friends and family can do to help you manage fatigue

Family members and friends can help support you when they:

- Help you with housework, chores, yard work, or cooking.
- Take a walk with you.
- Support your action plan.
- Connect you to local resources, such as a yoga class.

What if I want more help to manage fatigue?

There are health care specialists who can help you manage your fatigue, such as the following:

- **Palliative care physician.** A specialist who knows about the use of medications to treat cancer-related fatigue.
- **Physical therapist.** A physical therapist can show you safe ways to exercise. He or she also can help you create a fitness program and reach fitness goals.
- **Occupational therapist.** Occupational therapists are experts who can help you learn to conserve your energy. They can help you find ways to be as effective as possible in meeting the demands of family, work and social roles.
- **Psychologist.** A psychologist is a specialist who can help you understand and handle your feelings. He or she also can help you cope with the emotional struggles of feeling fatigued.
- **Social workers.** A social worker may be helpful in identifying mental health professionals.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community. There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage fatigue. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the manage fatigue tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

How to Manage Pain

Sometimes cancer causes pain. Cancer treatments also can cause pain. Cancer pain may be dull, achy or sharp. It can be constant, on and off, mild, moderate, or severe. But there are ways to ease your pain.

Keep a diary or log of your pain. Include when pain occurs, how long it lasts, and how intense it feels. Note where your pain is and what makes it better or worse. This information may help you recognize patterns or events that lead up to your pain. For instance, you may notice that you have a lot more pain in the middle of the night. This may be because you need pain medication that lasts longer when you sleep. Or you may notice you have less pain after your swim. This may mean that it's a good activity for you.

It is important to talk with a member of your health care team if you have pain. Also tell your health care team if what you are doing for pain relief does not work.

There are many ways to manage pain. When your pain is managed, you may sleep and eat better. You may enjoy activities and social occasions more. Your health care provider may prescribe pain medications. There are also non-medication pain treatments you can do on your own.

Medical therapies to manage pain

Medications, rehabilitation approaches and procedures are medical therapies to help manage pain.

Medications:

- Acetaminophen may ease mild pain. The daily dose should not be more than 4,000 mg, and you should not use acetaminophen if your liver is not working well.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, also called NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen or naproxen sodium, may ease pain that is mild to moderate. Talk to your cancer care team before using NSAIDs. This is because NSAIDs can cause harm when combined with some chemotherapy and oral cancer medications.
- Prescription pain medicines, such as gabapentin, duloxetine and steroids, may ease all types of cancer pain. They calm the nerves that carry pain signals. And they are effective for nerve pain.
- Opioids, also called narcotics, may ease cancer pain that is moderate to severe. Because of side effects and risk of addiction, these medications are usually prescribed for a limited time.

Note: Prescription pain medications can cause side effects. These may include constipation, light-headedness, dizziness, and nausea. Laxatives and stool softeners can help with constipation. When used for a long time, opioids can lead to addiction. Use opioids only as long as needed to manage your pain.

Rehabilitation approaches:

- Electrical stimulation applied to the skin can lessen the pain signals carried by your nerves. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, also called TENS, is one example. Depending on the type of pain you have and where it is, other electrical stimulation approaches can be used.
- Desensitization gently stimulates painful areas to make them less sensitive when touched.
- Braces or orthotics can be used to stabilize painful body parts. Low back braces are a common example. These can be lightweight. And they can be purchased as is or custom made.
- Manual techniques include myofascial release and special types of massage. These approaches are used to treat muscle pain and spasms.
- Therapeutic exercises improve the strength and flexibility of painful muscles. They also can stabilize painful joints.

Procedures:

- Nerve blocks can be used to prevent pain signals from reaching your brain. These can be temporary, such as when the dentist gives you Novocain™, or they can last longer. Nerve blocks work best when pain is in a limited area.
- Steroid injections can relieve pain from inflamed joints, tendons and nerves. These injections are usually given with special guidance from ultrasound or other imaging techniques.
- Trigger point injections are used to relieve spastic, painful muscles. They work best when a few painful areas can be targeted.
- Spinal approaches deliver pain medications directly to the central nervous system, as when an epidural eases pain during childbirth. Spinal approaches can be used in special situations for severe pain when oral medications don't work or cause bad side effects.

Behavior strategies to manage pain

- Cognitive behavioral therapy, also called CBT, can help you recognize negative thoughts that can make your pain worse.
- Relaxation, imagery and distraction can lessen stress that makes pain worse or more difficult to control. Listen to relaxing music or a favorite television program to help distract you from pain.
- Rest as you need to. Let painful areas relax.
- Use pillows to keep pressure off your area of pain and to help support your body in comfortable positions.

Physical activity to manage pain

Talk to your health care provider about a specific exercise program that may work for you. Common exercises for joint pain include stretching, swimming and yoga.

Integrative therapies to manage pain

The following integrative therapies may help ease your pain.

- Acupuncture.
- Massage.
- Guided imagery.
- Breathing, relaxation, mindfulness practices, and distraction.

Diet to manage pain

Make sure you get plenty of fiber in your food and you drink water throughout the day. Doing so may help prevent constipation if you take opioids.

What friends and family can do to help you manage pain

Family members and friends can help support you in the following ways. They can:

- Contact your health care provider for you if your pain is not tolerable.
- Give you a gentle backrub with warmed lotion.
- Watch for confusion and dizziness. This is especially important after new medicines start or when doses change.
- Encourage pleasant distractions, such as watching movies or playing games.
- Remind you to take your pain medication as prescribed in order to help you stay on schedule.
- Help you to remember to take stool softeners and laxatives to prevent constipation.

What if I want more help to manage pain?

There are health care specialists who can help you manage your pain, such as the following:

- **Physical therapist.** Physical therapy (PT) may help ease musculoskeletal pain. Modalities, such as electrical stimulation and massage also may help. With PT, you can learn how to stretch and strengthen certain areas that may cause you pain. PT can also help you with balance and using assisted devices.
- **Occupational therapist.** Occupational therapy (OT) may be able to teach you how to do everyday tasks in less pain. OT also uses special equipment to make your tasks easier so you can save your energy.
- **Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR) physician.** Physicians specialized in PMR can help you develop a program specific to your needs that combines exercise, medication, integrative therapies, and procedures to control your pain.
- **Palliative care physician.** Physicians who often prescribe medications to treat cancer-related pain.
- **Pain medicine specialist.** Physicians who practice pain medicine use injections, blocks, and other interventional procedures to control pain that is in one or a few locations.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community.

There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage pain. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the manage pain tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

How to Manage Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress. When you have cancer, you are more likely to have feelings of anxiety. Because of this, you may not feel like you want to socialize as much. That can affect your quality of life. At times, you also may struggle to complete your usual activities. Anxiety may cause the following:

- Worry.
- Restlessness.
- Muscle tension.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Feeling uneasy, scared or nervous.
- Crankiness, impatience or irritability.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Physical changes. These may include a faster heartbeat, sweating and trouble breathing. They also may include headache, nausea, diarrhea, dizziness, and high blood pressure.

Having good mental health is important for healing. There are things you can do to manage anxiety. The following information explains ways to help manage anxiety.

Medical therapies to manage anxiety

Sometimes it is helpful to see a psychiatrist before you start anxiety medication. Medication for anxiety can help you to:

- Get through medical procedures and cancer treatments. Talk to your care team about short-acting and long-acting medication options.
- Improve other symptoms, such as depression, nausea and trouble sleeping.

Behavior strategies to manage anxiety

- Seek out activities that bring you joy.
- Stay social. Spend time with people who bring you joy. You may feel you don't want to take part in activities or social gatherings because you don't want people to focus on your cancer. But avoiding things that make you anxious can actually make anxiety worse. Write a list of things that have helped you feel better in the past. Think about how you can continue to do things that make your life enjoyable.
- Try cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) skills to help challenge unwanted thoughts, feelings or behaviors.
- Work through your fears—don't avoid them. Unwanted thoughts that won't go away can make anxiety worse, especially regrets about the past. It takes a lot of energy to avoid unwanted thoughts, which can add to fatigue.

Common thoughts after a cancer diagnosis may be about fear of the unknown or fear of cancer coming back. As you work through your fears, it's possible you may feel worse for a little bit before you feel better.

Write down your worries. Separate them into two categories: worries you can control and worries you can't control. Focus on problem-solving for the things you can control. Try to accept what you cannot control.

- Try relaxation strategies, such as:
 - Belly breathing.
 - Guided imagery. Many examples can be found in popular smart phone apps or on the internet.
 - Using helpful images. Think of a safe, comfortable place.
 - Thinking about and finding meaning in what you still can do.
- Try these behavior strategies when you feel anxious:
 - Call a loved one, go for a walk, pet your dog, do a crossword puzzle.
 - Say a prayer or meditate.
 - Relax your body. Take a bubble bath or do deep breathing.

Physical activity to manage anxiety

Stay active as you are able. Even if you cannot be as active as you were before the cancer diagnosis, exercise helps anxiety. Physical activity, such as walking, exercise classes, or yoga, can:

- Ease and speed up your recovery after cancer treatments.
- Help you have more energy throughout the day.
- Help you feel relaxed later in the day.

Integrative therapies to manage anxiety

- Try daily meditation or mindfulness practice. These practices often help you focus on the present moment.
- Mind-body therapies, such as massage, acupuncture, reflexology, and Reiki can help you feel more relaxed.
- Art, dance and music therapies can also help you feel more relaxed.

Diet to manage anxiety

- Limit caffeine and other stimulants. This includes coffee, soda, tea, energy drinks, nicotine, and tobacco. Stimulants can increase your heart rate, which can make you feel anxious, especially if you are not moving around much.
- If you drink caffeine or use tobacco, you may feel worse for a little while as you cut back or quit. Your health care team may suggest you slowly cut back on stimulants. Some people use medication to help manage withdrawal symptoms. Talk with your health care team if you want help.
- Quitting nicotine or tobacco can be very difficult. However, quitting can improve your body's ability to fight cancer and it can help cancer treatments to be more effective. Your health care team can make quitting easier with medications, counseling or other tools. Talk with your health care team if you want help to quit nicotine or tobacco. Your health care team is here to help.
- Try to limit alcohol. Alcohol may help you temporarily relax, but it can worsen anxiety later and in the long term. Also, alcohol may reduce sleep quality through the night, which in turn can make anxiety and other symptoms worse.

What friends and family can do to help you manage anxiety

Family members and friends can help support you when they:

- Talk about anxiety and fears with you but do not force you to discuss your feelings before you are ready.
- Listen to you without judgement.
- Do relaxation exercises with you, such as deep breathing or visualizing pleasant scenery.
- Help with chores or situations, such as coming with you to appointments that you find stressful.
- Give you books, CDs or other resources that help lessen your anxiety.

What if I want more help to manage anxiety?

There are health care specialists who can help you manage anxiety, such as the following:

- **Social worker.** A social worker may be able to help find solutions to issues that cause anxiety for you, such as financial concerns.
- **Psychologist.** He or she can counsel you as you cope with cancer and symptoms related to cancer. A psychologist also can help if you struggle with negative self-talk, such as supporting you with mindfulness exercises and cognitive behavioral therapy, called CBT.
- **Psychiatrist.** A psychiatrist can prescribe medications to help depression or anxiety.
- **Integrative medicine practitioner.** He or she may suggest treatments to help you feel less stress. These may include acupuncture, mindfulness meditation and massage.
- **Physical therapist or physical medicine and rehabilitation physician.** Cancer and its treatment may make physical activity more difficult. And some people may not be sure about which activities are safe for them. A physical therapist or physical medicine and rehabilitation physician can partner with you to find activities right for you.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community.

There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage anxiety. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the manage anxiety tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

How to Manage Your Depressed Mood

Being diagnosed with cancer is a life-changing event that can cause symptoms of depression or low mood. You may feel like shutting people out. You may stop doing things you used to enjoy. You also may find it hard to focus or think.

Some other common symptoms of depressed mood include:

- **Negative feelings that don't go away.** You may feel sadness you can't shake. You may be irritable or anxious. You may feel helpless, hopeless or worthless. And you may have guilt about past or present events.
- **Loss of interest or pleasure in life.** Things that once brought you great joy may not anymore. Even routine things, such as brushing your teeth or exercising, may be hard to do when you are depressed.
- **Physical symptoms.** You may have fatigue, loss of energy, headaches, weight changes, and trouble with sleep.
- **Thoughts that overwhelm you.** You may find it hard to focus. You may have a negative view of yourself, others, and of the future.

Having good mental health is important for healing. Despite having cancer, depressed mood can be treated. Read the following to help you manage symptoms of depressed mood.

Medical therapies to help you manage depressed mood

Medication for depressed mood can help you:

- Improve your overall mood and interest in things you usually enjoy.
- Manage anxiety you may have.
- Improve sleep.

Talk to your health care team about medications that may help you manage depression.

Behavior strategies to help you manage depressed mood

- Seek out activities that bring you joy.
- Stay connected to others, especially people who bring you joy. Talk openly with your friends, family and your health care team about your cancer and depression. You may feel you don't want to take part in activities or social gatherings. Avoiding things can actually make depression worse.
- Write a list of activities that have helped you feel better in the past.
- Try strategies to help challenge unwanted thoughts or behaviors. Unwanted thoughts that won't go away can make depression worse, especially regrets about the past.
- Try cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) skills to help challenge unwanted thoughts, feelings or behaviors. Unwanted thoughts that won't go away can make depression worse, especially regrets about the past.
- Work through your fears—don't avoid them. Unwanted thoughts that won't go away can make depression worse. It takes a lot of energy to avoid unwanted thoughts, which can add to fatigue.

Common thoughts after a cancer diagnosis may be about fear of the unknown or fear of cancer coming back. As you work through your fears, it's possible you may feel worse for a little bit before you feel better. Write down your worries. Separate them into those worries you can control and those you can't control. Focus on problem-solving things you can control. Try to accept what you cannot control.

- Other helpful strategies include distraction, belly breathing, music therapy, and guided imagery. These strategies also can help lower stress.

Physical activity to help you manage depressed mood

Physical activity, such as walking, exercise classes or yoga, can:

- Ease depressed mood and speed up your recovery after cancer treatments.
- Improve your mood.
- Help you have more energy throughout the day.
- Help you feel relaxed later in the day.
- Help you sleep better, which may help your depressed mood.

Gentle physical activity is one of the best ways to improve your mood and fight a depressed mood. Even a small bit of activity, such as getting outside and walking to the mail box instead of staying in the house, can be effective. Also consider the following:

- Each day, do a few short physical activities or one longer activity.
- Have a friend or family member join you.
- Be active in areas that you are comfortable in. For example, walk in a mall or gym on cold days.

Integrative therapies to help you manage depressed mood

- Try daily meditation or mindfulness practice. These practices often help you focus on the present moment.
- Mind-body therapies, such as massage, acupuncture, reflexology, and Reiki, can help you feel less anxious and more relaxed.
- Art, dance and music therapies also can help.

Diet to help you manage depressed mood

Try to limit alcohol, which can make depression, anxiety, fatigue, and concentration worse. Alcohol may help you temporarily relax, but after a few hours it acts as a stimulant. And this makes anxiety worse. Alcohol also worsens sleep quality.

Talk to your health care team if you need help to quit alcohol. They are here to help you.

What friends and family can do to help to help you manage depressed mood

Family members and friends can support you in the following ways. They can:

- Spend time with you, especially during difficult times. Sometimes just having someone with you helps.
- Help you with your daily activities until you are able to care for these on your own. These may be situations or chores that you feel are stressful, such as going to nurse or doctor visits, paying bills or doing household tasks.
- Do relaxation exercises or physical activities with you.

What if I want more help to manage a depressed mood?

There are health care specialists who can help you manage your depressed mood, such as the following:

- **Social worker.** A social worker may be able to help find solutions to issues that add to you having a depressed mood, such as financial concerns.
- **Psychologist.** He or she can counsel you as you cope with cancer and symptoms. A psychologist also can help if you struggle with negative self-talk, such as supporting you with mindfulness exercises and cognitive behavioral therapy, called CBT.
- **Psychiatrist.** A psychiatrist can prescribe medications to help depression or low mood.
- **Physical therapist or physical medicine and rehabilitation physician.** Cancer and its treatment may make physical activity more difficult. And some people may not be sure about which activities are safe for them. A physical therapist or physical medicine and rehabilitation physician can partner with you to find activities right for you.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community.

There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage depressed mood. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the how to manage a depressed mood tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

How to Manage Your Weakened Physical Function

Cancer, along with treatments, can affect how your body works. You may notice your body struggles to perform as usual. Everyday activities may take longer and be harder to do.

Improving your physical function may help you to continue doing the things that you want and need to do. Better physical function also helps you to:

- Tolerate cancer treatments.
- Avoid being in the hospital.
- Live and do things independently.

Your weakened physical function, also called functional loss, may be caused by cancer, cancer treatments, or muscles that become small and weak over time. The best way to prevent functional loss caused by cancer and cancer treatments is to notice it early. Be sure to let your care team know immediately if a part of your body becomes weak. For instance, you may notice your arm or leg feels weaker. Also let your care team know if you have difficulty walking, getting out of a chair, or you struggle with your usual activities.

Low levels of hormones and low blood cell counts also can cause loss of function. Your care team may need to run tests or make changes to your treatment to manage these problems and improve your physical function.

Symptoms, especially pain, can also affect physical function. If you notice you are avoiding certain activities because of symptoms, let your health care provider know.

Keep a diary or log about your physical function. Include details about the following:

- Activities you struggle with.
- Symptoms you may have during activity, such as shortness of breath or stiff joints.
- Activities you feel confident about.
- How your physical function gets better or worse over time.
- Any falls or almost falls.

Be sure to share this information with your health care team.

There are many ways you can improve your physical function. You may have to try different activities. What may work for one type of functional loss may not work for another. And as your cancer treatments change, your physical function also may change. Staying active, however you are able, is most important. A little activity every day can go a long way. The following are other ways to help your physical function.

Medical therapies to manage weakened physical function

There are no medications proven to improve physical function. However, certain medications can help you with symptoms and causes of functional loss. Pain medicines are an example.

Some medications, such as steroids, can help people feel more energetic and stronger. But when you use these medications over long periods, they can cause problems, such as bone thinning and ulcers. Because of this, it is important to weigh the pros and cons.

Your health care provider also may recommend nutritional supplements and vitamins. He or she also may prescribe medications to increase your appetite.

Behavior strategies to manage weakened physical function

- Set realistic goals that are meaningful to you.
- Stay motivated. Negative thoughts can be discouraging. Cognitive behavioral therapy, also called CBT, can help you replace these thoughts with more constructive ones.
- Treat contributing symptoms, such as anxiety, depressed mood and fatigue. Left untreated, these symptoms can affect your physical function.
- Seek out physical activities that bring you joy.
- Reward yourself. After you finish an exercise or stick to an action plan, give yourself a reward. Maybe this is going to the movies or eating out at your favorite restaurant. Rewards also can help you stay motivated.
- Be aware that cancer treatments can reduce your energy for a time. Plan physical activity at times when you have more energy.

Physical activity to manage weakened physical function

Activity and exercise are the best ways to improve your physical function. Unless you cannot walk, a good place to start is by using a pedometer, smart phone or other activity monitor to keep track of your steps. Set a weekly step goal and try to increase it every two to three weeks. Make sure that your new goal is realistic but still pushes you a little.

Each person's fitness level is different. For instance, you may struggle with balance and flexibility while still being able to walk for miles. If you know your fitness limits, you'll be able to select exercises that are most effective for you. There are exercises to improve balance, endurance, strength, and flexibility. And if you combine exercises to create a personalized program, it is the best way to improve your physical function.

Exercise and physical activity can protect you from complications and side effects of cancer treatment. Benefits include improvements in:

- Bone mineral density.
- Hormonal function.
- Ability to tolerate stress.
- Blood pressure.

Start with easy exercises to help prevent injury and to help you set realistic goals. Try the following to increase your program slowly:

- Add time to your exercise.
- Do your exercise a little faster.
- Select more challenging exercises.

Once you can do your program with confidence, you can improve more quickly. You do this by performing exercises in ways that push you slightly beyond your normal limits. This should not be hard or uncomfortable.

Interval training is one way. It helps to improve endurance through aerobic exercises performed intensely for shorter periods of time separated by planned rest. Physical therapists are experts who can help advance your exercise. They also can help create a program just for you. Talk to your health care team if you want physical therapy support.

Your enjoyment and motivation are key. Try not to compare your level of fitness now with what it was before you were diagnosed. Take it day by day and week by week. Log your progress so you can see how you improve. Pick activities that you have always enjoyed and are comfortable doing. For example, if you always liked to hike, walk on level surfaces or use walking poles to help with balance. It may take time and willpower, but it is usually possible to get back to your level of fitness before your diagnosis.

Talk to your oncology care team before you start to exercise if you have any of the following:

- A recent fall or almost fall.
- Blood platelet counts below 15,000.
- Tubes, drains or open wounds.
- Diseases that affect your bones.
- Lymph nodes removed under your arm or in your groin or pelvis.

Integrative therapies to manage weakened physical function

- Alternative exercises, such as tai chi and yoga can help to increase strength, balance and flexibility. They may also reduce stress.
- Mindfulness practices can improve function by reducing anxiety and improving quality sleep.

Diet to manage weakened physical function

Diets have not been shown to improve physical function. However, getting enough protein and other nutrients for muscles and nerves can protect you from functional loss.

Note: If you are trying to gain weight, talk to your oncology team about a diet for you.

- Eat a balanced diet that includes proteins that are also low in saturated fat. They include lean meat, fish, skinless poultry, eggs, nuts and seeds, and low-fat dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cottage cheese. Eating enough protein is critical to prevent muscle loss.
- Avoid foods and drinks that are high in fat and sugar content.
- Drink plenty of water every day to stay hydrated.

What friends and family can do to help you manage weakened physical function

Family members and friends can help support you when they:

- Become your exercise partner or coach. Walking and exercising with you can help you stay active. Your loved ones can set their own fitness goals.
- Lighten your load. For instance, help you prepare meals and do other household chores. Their help may free you up to exercise.
- Give you rides to places where you can walk.
- Take you back and forth to classes and community programs.
- Give you encouragement and gently remind you of your goals.
- Help you to stick to your schedule.

What if I want more help to manage weakened physical function?

There are health care specialists who can help you manage your weakened physical function, such as the following:

- **Dietician.** A dietician can develop a high-protein diet just for you.
- **Athletic trainer or exercise physiologist.** These specialists can create an exercise plan for you.
- **Physical therapist.** Physical therapy (PT) can help you return to your fitness goals. This may be especially helpful after surgery or if one part of your body has been affected by cancer or cancer treatments. He or she also can help your balance and ability to move safely and independently.
- **Occupational therapist.** Occupational therapy (OT) may be able to teach you how to do everyday tasks in less pain. OT also uses special equipment to make your tasks easier so you can save your energy.
- **Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR) physician.** Physicians specialized in PMR can help you develop an exercise program when you have intense symptoms, other medical problems, or cancer in your bones or nerves.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community.

There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage weakened physical function. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the manage weakened physical function resource kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

How to Manage Sleep

Sleep often is affected after a cancer diagnosis. This may happen because of stress, pain, medications, and treatments. The following information explains ways to get a better night's rest.

Medical therapies to manage sleep

In addition to behavioral treatments that may help you sleep better, your provider may recommend medication.

The following are examples of sleep medications:

- Melatonin is an over-the-counter medication to help with sleep. Your body naturally makes melatonin, so you may have fewer side effects to melatonin medication than to other sleep medications. If you still struggle with sleep after several weeks of taking over-the-counter sleep medicine, talk to your health care provider again.
- There are a variety of additional medications that your care team may prescribe for sleep, including medicines such as trazodone and doxepin.

Note: Sleep medications, including over-the-counter medications, can have side effects. Talk with your health care provider about medication options for you and possible side effects.

Behavior strategies to manage sleep

- Use positive self-talk about sleep. Try to think of sleep as a positive event. When a person cannot get enough restful sleep, it is common to think of it in negative ways. Negative talk can cause more anxiety about sleep, which can lead to even less sleep. Cognitive behavioral therapy, also called CBT, can help with negative self-talk.
- Use your diary or log to record the concerns that may keep you up at night. Write about these sometime during the day. As you record, think about what you can do to help your worries. Keep in mind what you can and cannot control. Having a plan may make it easier to let your worries go when it's time to sleep.
- Limit naps. Don't take naps close to your bedtime. Only nap for 30 minutes or less.
- Have a routine and stick to it. Get up each day at the same time. Go to bed around the same time every night.
- Give yourself permission for restful sleep. Pets, children and partners who snore don't have to be in the bed with you. You will have more energy for them in the morning if you get good sleep.
- Allow time to unwind and relax before bedtime. For 1 hour before you go to bed, do not use electronics, such as computers or cell phones. And try not to talk or think about stressful issues before you go to bed.
- Create an environment that's relaxing and restful. Keep your room dark and inviting. If your room isn't quiet enough, try a noise machine that adds soothing sounds. Do not have other electronics in the bedroom.
- Do not watch the clock as you try to fall asleep.
- Get out of bed if you are not able to sleep. Do something that relaxes you until you feel sleepy again. This may be something like playing Sudoku or solitaire.

Physical activity to manage sleep

Exercise during the day if you can. Even walking short distances may help. Try not to exercise in the four hours before bedtime.

Integrative therapies to manage sleep

- Be mindful. Have moments when you focus only on what is happening right now. Be present in the moment and accept it as it is. These mindful moments are a good way to deal with a busy mind. They also can help you with stress.
- Relax. Let your body and mind relax for 20 to 30 minutes each day. Relaxation helps the body and mind react to stress. It also may help you fall asleep more easily. Progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery and relaxed breathing are forms of relaxation. Ask your health care provider about these techniques if you want more information.
- Use aromatherapy to help you create a restful setting for sleep. Lavender is a common scent for relaxing.

Diet to manage sleep

To help your body feel ready for rest:

- Do not drink caffeinated beverages after 12 noon.
- Avoid big or heavy meals in the 4 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid tobacco products.
- Try to limit alcohol. Alcohol may help you temporarily relax, but after a few hours it acts as a stimulant, which means it affects sleep quality.

What friends and family can do to help you manage sleep

- Read this information. Support from loved ones may help you manage your symptoms better.
- Create a sleep environment that's quiet, dark and ready for relaxation. Your partner also may have to change sleep habits to help you get a better night's rest.
- Exercise with you. Having someone to be active with may help you stick to your action plans.

What if I want more help to manage sleep?

Let your oncologist and health care provider know about the trouble you are having. There are sleep specialists, including psychologists, who can support you.

Talk with your care team about helpful resources available in your community.

There also are self-directed materials with **more** information to help you manage sleep. You can get these materials by:

- Going online at cancersymptoms.mayoclinic.org.
- Asking your care team.
- Requesting the manage sleep tool kit. To do so, contact 877-256-4974.

Notes

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.

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