

CANCER-RELATED FATIGUE

Questions to Ask Your Care Team

Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is one of the most common symptoms experienced by patients with, and survivors of, cancer. It is more severe, more distressing and less likely to be relieved by rest than the tiredness or fatigue of daily life.

Treating fatigue as early as possible, either following diagnosis or at the beginning of cancer treatment, can help prevent CRF from becoming a long-term issue.¹ Though fatigue is common for patients with and survivors of cancer, it is not an unavoidable part of the disease experience. It is often possible to lessen fatigue. However, before anything can be done to help the patient, the cancer care team must know about the level and severity of fatigue.

Patient's willingness to speak up about their fatigue is essential to early detection, assessment and treatment. The 2018 Lymphoma Coalition Global Patient Survey on Lymphomas and CLL found that less than 20 percent of patients with fatigue spoke to their doctor about how fatigue was impacting their life.

This document can help initiate proactive discussions between patients and their health team – including oncologists, haematologists, other doctors, nurses and allied healthcare professionals.

PREPARING

Before meeting with your healthcare provider about CRF, there are several ways to prepare to make sure your questions are answered, and that the information provided is retained:

- Write down your list of questions before the appointment. Also, prioritise the most important questions in case you run out of time during the appointment.
- Make sure you have a way to record the answers. Write them down in a notebook, take notes on a tablet or consider asking the healthcare professional if you can record the conversation to reference it later.
- Bring a family member or friend to the appointment so there is another person there for the conversation. They can help ask questions, record the answers and will also provide support during the discussion.
- You will need to speak openly with your doctor about your questions, concerns, and needs. Do not feel embarrassed to ask your doctor to repeat or further explain something.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Use this list of questions as a guide as you prepare for your discussion about cancer-related fatigue (CRF).

1. What is cancer-related fatigue? _____
2. Are there specific signs and/or symptoms to be aware of? When should I talk to my doctor or healthcare provider? _____
3. Is CRF normal? Do a lot of people experience CRF? _____
4. What causes CRF? _____
5. Is CRF related to how much sleep I get or my activity level? _____
6. What is the difference between CRF and being tired? _____
7. Can CRF be treated? _____
8. Are there programs at this hospital / cancer centre that address CRF? _____
9. Can you refer me to a therapist or program that can help me manage CRF? _____
10. Is there a patient organisation / support group that has information or support for CRF? _____
11. Do you know of any online tools to help manage CRF? _____
12. Are there any other activities I can do to help? Or things I should not do? _____
13. Are there any precautions I should take to help minimise CRF? _____
14. What can caregivers, friends or family do to help? _____
15. Will it go away? Is this something that I will always live with? _____

i. Kuiper B. Cancer-related fatigue the problem and a digital solution. Lecture presented at: HNHCP Educational Conference; February 1, 2019; Zurich, Switzerland.