

Fatigue and prostate cancer



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This fact sheet is for men who have prostate cancer or who've had treatment for prostate cancer and want to know more about fatigue (extreme tiredness). Your partner, family or friends might also find it helpful.

We explain the possible causes of fatigue and how it may affect your energy levels, thoughts, feelings, relationships and activities. We also suggest ways to manage your fatigue and include other sources of information and support.

Symbols

These symbols appear in this fact sheet to guide you to more information:



Speak to our Specialist Nurses



Read our publications

Our fatigue support service

Our Specialist Nurses offer a fatigue support service for men. They can give you information and ongoing support over phone. Speak to them, in confidence, on 0800 074 8383.

Our 'How to manage fatigue' online guide

Our interactive guide gives you practical ways to help you manage fatigue including quizzes, trackers to fill in and tips from other men.

Visit prostatecancer.org/guides

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of extreme tiredness that doesn't go away, even after you rest. Fatigue is different from normal tiredness. Normal tiredness might affect you if you've worked hard, exercised, or if you haven't had enough sleep. Unlike fatigue, normal tiredness usually gets better once you've rested.

Fatigue is very common in men with prostate cancer. Around three in four men with prostate cancer (74 per cent) will have fatigue at some point. There are things you can do to help manage your fatigue and give you more energy. And there's a lot of support available.



How might fatigue make me feel?

You might use some of these words to describe how fatigue makes you feel:

**tired exhausted weak lethargic
drained knackered shattered beat
weary spent weighed down
drowsy whacked done in**

Fatigue can make it hard to carry out your daily activities. It can make it difficult to do some things, such as:

- everyday tasks, such as getting dressed, having a shower or preparing food
- social activities, such as seeing friends and family
- sleeping (insomnia)
- concentrating
- remembering things
- understanding new information and making decisions.

Some men find that they suddenly feel very tired. This means you need to be careful in certain situations – for example, when you are driving.

Fatigue can affect your mood. It might make you feel sad, depressed or anxious. And you may feel guilty that you can't do the things you normally do.

It can also have an impact on your relationships. You may start to depend more on others. You might not feel able to go to work or see your friends and family as much as usual. This can make you feel lonely or isolated. Fatigue can also affect your sex life, as you may not have enough energy for sex.

Many men are surprised by how tired they feel and by the impact it has on their lives. Some men tell us that fatigue is one of the hardest parts of having prostate cancer. It can be very frustrating, especially if you are used to being active.

Every man's experience is different. You might have some or all of these effects of fatigue. And your feelings might change over time.



Fatigue hits you at random times. You feel okay and then all of a sudden you have a bad day. I found it difficult to adjust to.

A personal experience

Understanding new information

Because fatigue can affect your concentration, you might find it hard to understand new information about your prostate cancer. You might feel stressed about having to make decisions about your treatment. Talk to your doctor or nurse and take your time to make sure you have all the information you need before making any big decisions.

Why might I get fatigue?

We don't know exactly why men with prostate cancer commonly get fatigue. It's likely that lots of different things are involved, including the following.

- **Prostate cancer itself.** Cancer can stop the normal cells in your body from working properly. This can change the way your body uses energy and can cause fatigue.
- **Treatments for prostate cancer.** All treatments for prostate cancer can cause fatigue. Your fatigue is likely to be worse if you have hormone therapy, radiotherapy or chemotherapy, or more than one treatment at the same time.
- **Stress, anxiety or depression.** Feeling stressed or worried can cause fatigue. You might be worried about being diagnosed with cancer or about having treatment. Depression can also cause fatigue.

- **Travelling to appointments.** Travelling to the hospital or GP surgery for treatments and check-ups can make your fatigue worse.
- **Symptoms of advanced prostate cancer.** Some problems that can be caused by advanced prostate cancer, such as pain or anaemia, can cause fatigue.
- **Pain or pain-relieving drugs.** You might have pain caused by your prostate cancer or by another health problem. Pain can make your fatigue worse. Some pain-relieving drugs can also cause fatigue. Speak to your doctor to make sure you're on the best pain-relieving drugs for you.
- **Other health problems.** Some other health problems, such as kidney disease or arthritis, can cause fatigue.
- **Not sleeping well.** Not sleeping well at night can make your fatigue worse. And having fatigue can make it harder to sleep well. You might have worries that keep you awake at night. Or you might wake up in the night because of symptoms of prostate cancer or side effects from your treatment, such as having a hot flush or needing to urinate (pee).
- **Lack of physical activity.** Being inactive can make your fatigue worse. It can also make it harder to sleep properly at night. You might not have a lot of energy so it can be difficult to be more active. But taking up regular physical activity during your treatment can improve your fatigue.
- **Other things that use up energy.** Other things may also use up your energy and make your fatigue worse – things like going to work, caring for other people, or meeting up with friends or family. It's important to think about things like this, to see what could be making your fatigue worse.

How long will my fatigue last?

How long fatigue lasts will vary from man to man. It may get better or worse over time. How long the fatigue lasts will depend on what's causing it.

If your fatigue is caused by your treatment, it may improve when you finish treatment. But some men have fatigue for months, or sometimes years. If you have life-long treatment this can cause long-term fatigue. How long the fatigue lasts also depends on the type of treatment you've had.

Surgery (radical prostatectomy)

Some men who have surgery get fatigue for a few weeks afterwards, but it can last for longer.

Radiotherapy

If you're having radiotherapy to treat your cancer, you may have external beam radiotherapy, or a type of internal radiotherapy called brachytherapy. Both types of radiotherapy can cause similar levels of fatigue. Men on radiotherapy often find that their fatigue gets worse over time, and sometimes doesn't start until after their radiotherapy has finished. Some men find that their fatigue improves when their treatment finishes, but for others, it can last for several months.

If your cancer has spread from your prostate to other parts of your body (advanced prostate cancer), you may be offered a short course of radiotherapy to treat symptoms such as pain. Your fatigue may be worse for a week or two after your treatment finishes.

High-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) and cryotherapy

These treatments can both cause fatigue but we don't know how long the fatigue might last for. This is because they are newer and less common than some of the other treatments for prostate cancer.

Hormone therapy

Some men find that their fatigue gets better over time while they're having hormone therapy. Others find it gets worse over time.

If you're only on hormone therapy for a few months, your fatigue may improve after you stop treatment.

If you're on long-term hormone therapy and are finding your fatigue difficult to deal with, you may be able to have a break from treatment if tests suggest the cancer isn't growing. This is called intermittent hormone therapy. Taking a break from treatment may mean that your fatigue improves. But it can take several months before you may notice an improvement.

Chemotherapy

A course of chemotherapy is given as a number of sessions, each three weeks apart. During a course of chemotherapy, your energy levels may go up and down. Fatigue is usually worse during the week after each treatment session but then gradually improves. Fatigue usually gets worse as you have more sessions.

After finishing a course of chemotherapy, most men find their energy levels improve. But for some, fatigue can be long-lasting.

Top tip

Keeping active during treatment might help your fatigue to improve more quickly. Read about how to stay active on page 6.

How can I manage fatigue?

Lots of things can cause fatigue, so there's no one thing that can get rid of it completely. But there are lots of things you can do to improve or manage your fatigue. Small changes to your life can make a big difference.

Talk to your doctor or nurse

Let your doctor know if you have fatigue. They can help you understand what might be making your fatigue worse and help you find ways to manage your fatigue. They can also check for any other health problems that might be causing your fatigue or making it worse.

Keep active

Physical activity can help to improve fatigue (see page 6).

Plan ahead and take things slowly

You might not have enough energy to do everything you used to do. But if you plan ahead, you can try to do the things that are most important to you.

Keeping a diary can help you plan your activities. Download our fatigue diary at prostatecanceruk.org/tired

Some men find thinking about 'the five Ps' helpful when planning their time (see below).

The five Ps

Plan

Write a list of all the things you have to do.

Prioritise

Work out what's most important to you each day and put that at the top of your list.

Pace

Allow extra time to get things done. Stop before you get too tired.

Permission

Give yourself permission to do things differently and take things easy for a while.

Position

Make the task easier. You could sit down instead of standing if it's more comfortable.



I am now coping with the fatigue by identifying things I really want to do, and focusing my energy on those things.

A personal experience

Get help with emotional problems

Fatigue can sometimes be linked to feeling depressed or anxious. Feeling down can make you feel less energetic, and worrying all the time can affect your sleep and make your fatigue worse. If you're having any of these feelings, talking to someone or getting some support can help.

Ask for help

It can be difficult to ask for help when you're used to being independent. But partners, family members and friends will usually want to help. Think about which activities you want to do for yourself, and which ones someone else could do for you.

Make time to relax

Taking time to relax is really important. It can help with the stress of having cancer treatment and with fatigue. Try to find time to relax every day, for example by meditating, doing breathing exercises, or listening to music or an audiobook.

Eat and drink well

Eating a healthy diet can boost your energy levels. If you have problems with your diet, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian. If you don't have the energy to prepare food for yourself, you could ask a friend or family member to help. Or you can order healthy, cooked meals to be delivered to your home, from your local authority or a private company. Find out more at prostatecanceruk.org/tired

Drinking plenty of fluids can improve your energy levels. Try to drink around 1.5 to 2 litres (3 to 4 pints) of water a day. If you often need to urinate at night, you may worry about drinking a lot. But drinking plenty of water can help to prevent bladder irritation – this means you may not need to urinate so often and may sleep better at night. However, it might help to drink less in the two hours before you go to bed. And try to avoid fizzy drinks, alcohol, and drinks that contain caffeine (tea, coffee and cola), as these can irritate your bladder and make you urinate more often.

Read more about healthy eating in our fact sheet, **Diet and physical activity for men with prostate cancer**.



Sort out your sleep

Although fatigue doesn't always get better when you rest, sleeping well can help to improve your fatigue. The following tips may help you get a proper rest at night.

During the day

- Do some physical activity. Regular physical activity can help you sleep better.
- Try to stick to a routine so your body gets used to going to bed and getting up at the same time every day.
- Avoid sleeping during the day if you can. If you're feeling very tired during the day, try resting or doing a relaxing activity, rather than sleeping.

Before you go to sleep

- Feeling hungry can disturb your sleep. Have a bedtime snack, like a banana.
- Try to cut down on all drinks in the evening, even water, so you don't have to get up to urinate so often. Make sure you still drink plenty of water during the day.
- Avoid food and drinks that contain caffeine or sugar as they will keep you awake. This includes tea, coffee, and cola.
- Avoid drinks that might irritate your bladder and make you get up more in the night to urinate. This includes fizzy drinks, alcohol and drinks that contain caffeine.
- Don't watch TV or use electronic devices such as a computer, tablet computer or mobile phone for at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.
- Keep a worry book. If you can't get to sleep because you're worrying about something, write it down. Look at your worries during the day and ask your family, friends and medical team if they can help you sort them out.

Prepare your bedroom

- Make sure there isn't too much light in your bedroom. An eye mask and dark blinds or curtains might help.
- Make your bedroom as quiet as possible. You could try using ear plugs.
- Make your bedroom a comfortable temperature. This can be particularly important if you have hot flushes that wake you up at night.



If you're still having trouble sleeping, speak to your GP or call our Specialist Nurses. Your GP may sometimes prescribe a course of sleeping pills to help you get some rest.

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies may be used alongside medical treatment. Small studies have found that yoga, acupuncture, meditation and massage can improve fatigue in people who have cancer.

Some complementary therapies may have side effects or may interfere with your cancer treatment. So make sure your doctor or nurse knows about any complementary therapies you're using or thinking of trying. And make sure that any complementary therapist you see knows about your cancer and treatments.

Some complementary therapies are available through hospices, GPs and hospitals. But if you want to find a therapist yourself, make sure they are properly qualified and belong to a professional body. You can get advice on finding a properly qualified therapist from the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council.

Macmillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK have more information about different therapies and important safety issues to think about when choosing a therapy.

Physical activity

Physical activity can help to improve fatigue. It can improve your:

- energy levels
- sleep
- appetite
- general health
- mood
- strength
- weight.



I found exercise the best thing to combat fatigue. It motivates you, and keeps your spirits up.

A personal experience

How to get started with physical activity

Lots of people find it hard to be more active. You might be worried that you're not fit enough to start doing exercise. Or you might feel frustrated that you're not as fit as you used to be. Some treatments for prostate cancer can cause urinary incontinence, so some men worry about leaking urine when they exercise. You might also be worried about hurting yourself. If you're worried about any of these things, speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist. They can give you advice on the best activity for you.

Doing any activity is better than none. Do what you can and build up slowly. We've included some ideas below. You can also speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.

Light to moderate exercise can make you feel more awake. You could try:

- standing up and sitting down
- walking to the shops
- climbing stairs
- cycling
- fixing things around the house
- mowing the lawn
- vacuuming
- washing the car
- swimming.

If you do light to moderate exercise along with strength or resistance training, such as lifting light weights or using elastic resistance bands, this may be even more effective.

You can even exercise from your chair or bed. Try lifting your arms and legs or bending and straightening them. This can help improve your movement and muscle strength.

If you're on hormone therapy or have cancer that has spread to the bones, you may be at risk of weak bones. This can increase your risk of broken bones (fractures). It's important to speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist before you start a new activity or increase the amount of physical activity you do. They can talk to you about exercising safely.

Top tip

Speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist about what type of exercise might be suitable for you.



I enjoy cycling and the ride to hospital is important to me. It says life is normal and it keeps me physically fit.

A personal experience

Exercise referral schemes

Ask your doctor or nurse if there is an exercise referral scheme in your area. These are special exercise programmes for people with health problems, including prostate cancer and fatigue. They are run by healthcare professionals or fitness trainers who have experience of working with people who have health problems. Research shows that doing exercises such as swimming or fast walking at least twice a week for 12 weeks can help men on hormone therapy to reduce their fatigue.

Walking

Walking can reduce fatigue in men with prostate cancer. Joining a walking group can be an enjoyable and sociable way to start doing gentle physical activity. Find walks and walking groups at prostatecanceruk.org/tired



My local walking club helped keep me fit and make new friends.

A personal experience

Finding places to exercise

You might prefer to use a gym, go to a swimming pool or join an exercise class. Find somewhere to exercise near you at prostatecanceruk.org/tired

Dealing with fatigue at work

If you're living with or after prostate cancer, continuing to work can be an important way of getting back to normal life. But not everyone is able to keep working, and some may decide to work part-time or take early retirement.

Your rights at work

There are laws that protect anyone who has cancer or has had cancer. Even if you no longer have cancer, you are still protected against discrimination.

In England, Scotland or Wales, the Equality Act protects your rights. In Northern Ireland the Disability Discrimination Act protects your rights.

Under these laws your employer has a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to where and how you work, to make sure you get the same chances as the people you work with. For example, a reasonable adjustment could be:

- giving you time off to go to medical appointments
- allowing extra breaks if you feel tired
- changing your job role to remove tasks that cause you problems
- providing suitable toilet facilities.

You can find out more about your rights at work during and after cancer treatment from Macmillan Cancer Support.

What else can help?

If your employer learns more about prostate cancer, they might be more understanding. You could give them this fact sheet to read.

Take a look at your company policies and employee handbook. Talk to your occupational health service for advice.

Go to your employer with suggestions about what would help you. For example, taking extra breaks, working from home, flexible hours, or changing your job role or duties for a while.

Know your legal rights. Find out more about the law and make sure your boss or company is aware of it. Contact your union if you are part of one. Citizens Advice can also help.

If you are self-employed or looking for work, you can get more specific information from Macmillan Cancer Support or Disability Rights UK.

Fatigue and relationships

Prostate cancer can change the normal pattern of your life, and affect relationships, friendships and roles within your family. It can bring challenges, but can also bring some couples and families closer together.

If you have fatigue, you might feel too tired to look after yourself. You might become more dependent on your partner, family or friends. This can feel frustrating. You might feel guilty or embarrassed that you can't do as much as you used to. This can put stress on your relationships. But there are things that can help.

You might find it helpful to:

- learn more about fatigue together
- talk about how you feel
- get support as a family

- get help with practical matters such as work, money or household tasks
- develop a wider support network including other family members or friends.

Try to make time for family activities. You may not feel up to some activities that you have done together in the past. But it could be a chance to try something new.

Fatigue and sex

You may not have enough energy for sex. Prostate cancer and its treatments can also cause sexual problems, such as difficulty getting or keeping an erection (erectile dysfunction).

 Read more about sex and relationships in our booklet, **Prostate cancer and your sex life**. It comes with a DVD of men talking about their own experiences. The information and films are also available on our website.

Where can I get more support?

Your medical team

It can be useful to speak to your doctor, nurse or someone else in your medical team. Tell your doctor about your fatigue, even if they don't ask about it. They might look at the causes of your fatigue and suggest some things that might help. They may refer you to an exercise programme. And they may refer you to see one of the following specialists to get extra support.

- A counsellor or clinical psychologist can help you deal with the emotional side effects of fatigue and prostate cancer. They can help you find your own ways to deal with things.
- Occupational therapists provide advice and access to equipment to help with daily life, such as bathing or using the stairs.
- Physiotherapists advise on exercises to help improve mobility and fitness.

Our Specialist Nurses



Our Specialist Nurses can answer your questions and explain your diagnosis and treatment options. They've got time to listen, in confidence, to any concerns you have.

Our one-to-one support service

Our one-to-one support service is a chance to speak to someone who's been there and understands what you're going through. They can share their experiences and listen to yours. You can discuss whatever's important to you. Our Specialist Nurses will try to match you with someone with similar experiences.

Our online community

Our free online community is a place to talk about whatever's on your mind – your questions, your ups and your downs. Anyone can ask a question or share an experience.

Local support groups

At local support groups, men get together to share their experiences of living with prostate cancer. You can ask questions, share worries and know that someone understands what you're going through. Some groups have been set up by local health professionals, others by men themselves. Many also welcome partners, friends and relatives.

Our fatigue support service

Our Specialist Nurses provide a fatigue support service for men. They are specially trained to deliver information and ongoing support over the telephone. They will encourage you to take practical steps to manage your fatigue.



To find out more about any of the above, visit prostatecanceruk.org/get-support or call our Specialist Nurses on 0800 074 8383.

Supporting someone with fatigue

Supporting a partner, friend or family member with fatigue can be very difficult. There are things that might help.

- Ask your loved one what he feels able to do and support him to do those things.
- Ask what he doesn't feel able to do and look into ways you or other people could help with those things.
- Ask if your loved one would like you to go to hospital appointments with him.
- Learn more about fatigue so you understand what your loved one is going through.
- Look into ways to deal with any feelings you might have about your loved one's fatigue, like feeling frustrated or upset.
- Make sure you get enough rest so that you have enough energy to support him.
- Ask friends and family for help.
- Ask your doctor for support.

Read more about how you can support someone with prostate cancer in our booklet, **When you're close to a man with prostate cancer: A guide for partners and family.**



I thought it was just me, but then I realised loads of other men have fatigue. Sharing my experience helped me deal with it.

A personal experience

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse



You may find it helpful to keep a note of any questions you have to take to your next appointment.

Is my prostate cancer treatment likely to cause fatigue?

How long might my fatigue last?

What can I do to improve or manage my fatigue?

What physical activity is suitable for me?

Is there a local support group for men with prostate cancer-related fatigue?

How can I access a local exercise programme?

What other support is available to me?

Who can I speak to for advice about work?

More information

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Telephone: 0808 800 4040

Patient information from Cancer Research UK.

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Telephone: 03444 111 444 (England)

03444 77 20 20 (Wales)

Advice on a wide range of issues including financial and legal matters.

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council

www.cnhc.org.uk

Telephone: 020 3668 0406

Details of therapists who meet national standards.

Disability Rights UK

www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Telephone: 020 7250 8181

Practical information guides about disability rights and benefits.

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 808 00 00

Practical, financial and emotional support for people with cancer, their family and friends.

Maggie's Centres

www.maggiescentres.org

Telephone: 0300 123 1801

Drop-in centres for cancer information and support. Includes an online support group.

NHS

www.nhs.uk

Information and advice, including information about how to eat healthily and exercise.

Support for carers and a directory of health services in England.

Penny Brohn UK

www.pennybrohn.org.uk

Telephone: 0303 3000 118

Runs courses and offers physical, emotional and spiritual support for people with cancer and those close to them.

About us

Prostate Cancer UK has a simple ambition: to stop men dying from prostate cancer – by driving improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support.



This fact sheet is part of the Tool Kit. You can order more fact sheets, including an **A to Z of medical words**, which explains some of the words and phrases used in this fact sheet.

Download and order our fact sheets and booklets from our website at **prostatecanceruk.org/publications** or call us on **0800 074 8383**.

At Prostate Cancer UK, we take great care to provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope these will add to the medical advice you have had and help you to make decisions. Our services are not intended to replace advice from your doctor.

References to sources of information used in the production of this fact sheet are available at **prostatecanceruk.org**

This publication was written and edited by our Health Information team.

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- Our Specialist Nurses
- Our Volunteers.



Speak to our Specialist Nurses

0800 074 8383*

prostatecanceruk.org

Donate today – help others like you

Did you find this information useful? Would you like to help others in your situation access the facts they need? Every year, over 47,000 men face a prostate cancer diagnosis. Thanks to our generous supporters, we offer information free to all who need it. If you would like to help us continue this service, please consider making a donation. Your gift could fund the following services:

- £10 could buy a Tool Kit – a set of fact sheets, tailored to the needs of each man with vital information on diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle.
- £25 could give a man diagnosed with a prostate problem unlimited time to talk over treatment options with one of our Specialist Nurses.

To make a donation of any amount, please call us on **0800 082 1616**, visit **prostatecanceruk.org/donate** or text **PROSTATE** to **70004**[†].

There are many other ways to support us. For more details please visit **prostatecanceruk.org/get-involved**

[†] You can donate up to £10 via SMS and we will receive 100% of your donation. Texts are charged at your standard rate. For full terms and conditions and more information, please visit prostatecanceruk.org/terms



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Call our Specialist Nurses from Monday to Friday 9am - 6pm, Wednesday 10am - 8pm

* Calls are recorded for training purposes only.
Confidentiality is maintained between callers and Prostate Cancer UK.

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