

Cancer-Related Fatigue Fact Sheet

What Is Cancer-Related Fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is a distressing, persistent and subjective sense of physical, emotional and/or cognitive tiredness or exhaustion related to cancer or cancer treatment that is not proportional to recent activity and interferes with usual functioning.¹ It's extremely common and pervasive. In fact, it affects more patients than any other symptom and is regarded by patients as more distressing than either pain or nausea.²⁻⁷ What's more, persistent CRF correlates to higher levels of disability, it can have significant negative financial consequences for patients, and it can decrease the chance of remission or cure by reducing a patient's desire to continue treatment.⁸

Key Facts about CRF / New Research about CRF

- Up to one-third of all cancer survivors have "clinically relevant levels of CRF" as much as six months post-treatment.
- CRF was reported to affect 58% of patients "somewhat or very much." The comparable figures for pain and nausea/vomiting were 22% and 18%, respectively.
- In one study, only 14% of patients received treatment or advice about the management of their fatigue.

Causes of Cancer-Related Fatigue

Various cancer treatments can cause CRF, including surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. CRF may also be caused by the cancer itself. In addition, other medical conditions such as anemia, hypothyroidism, and psychological factors - such as depression or anxiety - can contribute to greater fatigue.

Know the Signs & Symptoms of CRF

The first step in overcoming CRF is knowing the symptoms. The following diagnostic criteria* can help identify CRF:

- Generalized weakness, heaviness in limbs
- Decreased concentration, attention and/or memory
- Lack of motivation for normal activities and social interaction
- Changes in sleep patterns (difficulty with or excessive sleep)
- Difficulty overcoming inactivity
- Irritability and listlessness
- Difficulty with starting or completing the activities of daily living
- Need to sleep throughout the day
- Limited ability to eat due to fatigue

* Source: The Fatigue Coalition as well as those identified by the FACT-F⁹⁻¹⁰

Cancer-Related Fatigue Fact Sheet

Treatment for Cancer-Related Fatigue

In the past, patients who complained of fatigue were often advised to rest, but studies show that this can exacerbate the problem, as it can lead to loss of muscle and reduced cardiorespiratory fitness. This makes it seem harder to accomplish normal activities, adding to the sense of fatigue.

Today, exercise is the strongest literature-supported, non-pharmacological intervention for treatment of CRF, particularly multimodal exercise consisting of moderate to high intensity aerobic activity and resistance training.^{1, 11-12} It can not only improve functional ability and decrease the physical perception of CRF, but also relieve emotional and mental distress leading to a higher overall quality of life.

Treatment options include:

- Aerobic and resistance exercise
- Postural and body mechanics education to improve movement efficiency
- Energy conservation and activity modification education
- Stretching exercises
- Breath retraining
- Mindfulness/relaxation techniques
- Sleep hygiene

ReVital is a Leader in Cancer Rehabilitation

ReVital cancer rehabilitation therapists have been specially trained to prescribe safe and effective exercise programs for people with cancer and survivors of all cancer types. They have extensive knowledge on the effects of cancer treatment and other medical comorbidities that could impact exercise tolerance. They also understand proper metrics for exercise prescription, allowing survivors to realize the full physiological benefits.

The ReVital team is happy to schedule a team training session on best practices for screening patients with cancer-related fatigue. We're flexible and will make it as easy as possible to learn more about screening and referral set up.

Cancer-Related Fatigue Fact Sheet

References

1. National Comprehensive Cancer Network Guidelines Version 2.2018. Cancer Related Fatigue. NCCN.org. Accessed 14 May 2018
2. Stone P, Richardson A, Ream E, Smith EG et al. Cancer-related fatigue: Inevitable, unimportant and untreatable? Results of a multi-centre patient survey. *Annals of Oncology*. 2000; 11 (8): 971-975 <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1008318932641>
3. Cella D : The Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-Anemia (FACT-An) Scale: A new tool for the assessment of outcomes in cancer anemia and fatigue. *Semin Hematol* 34:13-19, 1997 (suppl 2) 13.
4. Vogelzang N, Breitbart W, Cella D, et al: Patient, caregiver, and oncologist perceptions of cancer-related fatigue: Results of a tri-part assessment survey. *Semin Hematol* 34:4-12, 1997 (suppl 2)
5. Cella D, Tulsky D, Gray G, et al: The functional assessment of cancer therapy scale: Development and validation of the general
6. Irvine D, Vincent L, Graydon J, et al: The prevalence and correlates of fatigue in patients receiving treatment with chemotherapy and radiation therapy: A comparison with the fatigue experienced by healthy individuals. *Cancer Nurs* 17:367-378, 1994
7. Blesch K, Paice J, Wickman R, et al: Correlates of fatigue in people with breast or lung cancer. *Oncol Nurs Forum* 18:81-87, 1991
8. Jones JM, Olson K, Catton P, Catton CN, et al. Cancer-related fatigue and associated disability in post-treatment cancer survivors. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*. 2016; 10 (1): 51-61.
9. Cella D, Peterman A, Passik S, et al: Progress toward guidelines for the management of fatigue. *Oncology*. 1998; 12:369-377.
10. Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy. FACIT-Fatigue. www.facit.org/FACITORG/Questionnaires. Accessed 15 May 2018.
11. Menses-Eschavez JF, Gonzalez-Jimenez E and Ramirez-Velez R. Effects of supervised multimodal exercise interventions on cancer-related fatigue: Systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Biomed Research International*. 2015; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/328636>
12. Van Waart H, Stuver M, van Harten WH, Gelejin E, et al. Effect of low-intensity physical activity and moderate to high intensity physical exercise during adjuvant chemotherapy on physical fitness, fatigue and chemotherapy completion rates: Results of the PACES randomized controlled trial