



# Managing Cancer Treatment-Related Fatigue (CRF)



## What is CRF?

Fatigue during cancer therapy (CRF) is different from ordinary tiredness:

- CRF causes severe mental as well as physical exhaustion
- CRF isn't relieved by rest
- CRF may last for several months after treatment

## What Causes CRF?

CRF is the most common side-effect of cancer treatment. However, it can be made worse by

- nutritional imbalance
- anaemia (usually low blood haemoglobin levels)
- lack of exercise
- psychological factors, such as emotional distress or depression



## What Can I Do to Manage My CRF?

There are several things that you can do to help to minimize CRF:

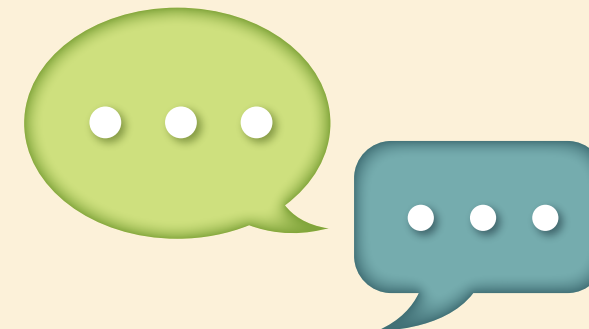
1. Know what is contributing to your CRF. Use the diary at the back of this leaflet to record what you do and how your CRF varies over several days. This will help you identify any "triggers" that make CRF worse
2. A healthy lifestyle makes a big difference! Very often, CRF is linked to poor sleep quality
  - a. Keep active. Though you may not feel you have the energy, try to make yourself do activities that you can manage and push yourself bit by bit to do more. This will help you sleep
  - b. Do exercise. You may feel tired but, over time, exercise will help to counter CRF and build strength. Try to do a bit more each day. You will sleep better and feel more refreshed when you wake
  - c. Napping helps. Limit daytime naps to 20 minutes at a time and no more than twice a day. Do not nap after 4pm. The more you sleep during the day, the less you'll sleep at night
  - d. If you smoke, stop. If it is hard, try using nicotine gum or patches after a healthcare professional is consulted
  - e. Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate, cola) after 3pm to prevent interference with sleep quality
  - f. Avoid alcohol for the duration of your treatment and limit intake afterwards – it disrupts sleep and can interfere with the action of some medicines
  - g. Healthy diet. Eat a balanced, vegetable-based diet, with more vegetable (tofu, beans, legumes) and less animal protein. Avoid fast food. Ask your doctor or **HKU Jockey Club Institute of Cancer Care** staff for a referral to dietetic services



3. Slow down. Plan your day and schedule activities to coincide with times you feel more energetic:
  - a. Give yourself more time, take regular breaks, and be patient, to minimize self-imposed stress
  - b. Postpone less important activities
  - c. Keep frequently-used things close-by to avoid repeated actions that use energy
4. Manage stress and distress:
  - a. Don't put pressure on yourself. Try to accept that your body needs time to recover. Be compassionate with yourself
  - b. Find ways to unwind and relax
  - c. Talk to your family or friends. Let them help
  - d. If you feel panicky, anxious or fearful, or you have low mood and loss of interest in things, call **HKU Jockey Club Institute of Cancer Care** at 3917 9606, and he/she will offer further advice and, if needed, referral

## When Will I Recover?

Some people recover quickly once treatment ends, but others find that it takes several months. If fatigue persists for more than 4 weeks after the end of treatment, you may need additional help. Call **3917 9606**.



## Fatigue Diary

Use this diary to help learn about your fatigue.

List medicines you are currently taking and the time taken:

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Use a simple number scale to record your fatigue level 0=None; 1= Much less than usual; 2= A bit less than usual; 3= About usual; 4=A bit worse than usual; 5=Much worse than usual

Date	Time	Activity	Degree of fatigue	How to deal with it?	Helpful? Yes / No