

Making the Most of Your Time and Energy



Symptom Management

Practical Strategies for Managing Cancer Related Fatigue



Table of Contents

3 Energy Conservation

What is energy conservation?

When should I use conservation strategies?

The 7 Principles of Energy Conservation 4-7

8 Personal Care

Dressing 8

Bathing 8

Grooming 9

Eating 9

Stairs 9

Mobility 10

Transfers 10-11

12 Daily Living

Preparing Your Meals 12

Cleaning 13

Laundry 14

Yard Maintenance 15

Shopping 16

Child Care 17

Sexuality 18-19

Leisure 19

Energy Conservation

What is energy conservation?

It is a common sense approach to:

- Complete more activities with less effort
- Balance rest and energy use
- Help you continue to participate in activities that are meaningful to you



When should I use conservation strategies?

- During low energy times, like during your cancer treatments
- When an activity is difficult to do or it uses up your energy
- When you would like to make sure you use your energy for more meaningful or important tasks
- Remember – to help maintain your physical fitness, continue to participate in your normal activities as much as possible

The 7 Principles of Energy Conservation:

1 Schedule

- Plan ahead. Balance your day with activities that use little energy like reading the newspaper, and activities that use more energy like yardwork.
- Create a list of daily or weekly activities that need to be completed.
- Rank activities based on how important you think they are, and complete the high priority activities when you have more energy.

2 Pace

- Move at a comfortable pace or speed.
- Alternate heavy and light work throughout your daily and weekly schedule
- Plan rest periods and take a break before you become fatigued.

3 Delegate

- Ask for help with activities that are difficult, use a lot of energy, or are not important to you.
- Consider family, friends, volunteers, community resources, or hired services.

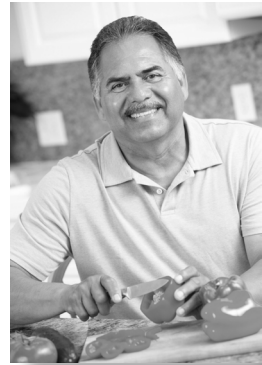


4 Neglect

- Perform activities less often (vacuuming), less thoroughly (choose pre-prepared produce), or not at all (making the bed).

5**Sitting**

- Sit to complete activities when you can to save energy.
- Sit on higher surfaces to conserve energy when you stand up.
- Check your posture — keep your body in a straight line. Avoid bending or reaching, especially for heavy items.

**6****Simplify**

- Adapt the activity or environment so you use less energy, or to make a task easier.
- Storage: organize items close to where you use them, and at your waist height when possible so you don't need to bend down to lift. Consider keeping 2 sets of items you use often in convenient spots. For example, you could keep a set of salt and pepper shakers near the stove and a set at the dining table.
- Equipment: use lightweight tools, wheeled carts, make use of technology (dishwasher, robovac, electric toothbrush). Consider adaptive aids like bath stools if your energy level is low or you're feeling weak.

- Plan rest periods throughout the day. Several short rest periods are better than 2 or 3 long rest periods.
- Avoid long or late afternoon naps.

If getting a good night's sleep is a challenge:

Make sleep a priority and get the rewards:

- Getting enough sleep helps improve physical health like healing, digestion, emotional well-being, and cognitive functioning like memory and problem solving.

Look at your sleep environment:

- Get rid of noise—fans, and white noise machines can help decrease disruptions.
- Get rid of light: use dark window coverings, and remove electronics from the bedroom.
- Maintain a cool temperature.
- Use a comfortable mattress and pillow. If pain/discomfort keeps you up or wakes you at night, talk to your Occupational Therapist for strategies.

Consider your routine:

- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine 12 hours before bed.
- Exercise regularly during the day.

Create a sleep routine:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine (have a bath, read a book, get ready for the next day).
- Go to bed when you are tired.
- Use your bed only for sleep: no reading, using laptops, or watching television in bed.
- If you're still awake after 20 minutes, do something relaxing. Try to fall asleep again in 20 minutes.

Relaxation strategies:

- Deep breathing, visualization, mindfulness, and progressive muscle relaxation may help you sleep if your thoughts or worries keep you up at night.



Personal Care

Below are some ideas you can try to help save some energy and make your personal care easier.



Dressing:

- Sit to put on your socks, pants, and shoes.
- Choose clothing that is loose fitting, and easy to pull on.
- Use slip on shoes.
- Try button up shirts — they may be easier to put on than pulling a top over your head.
- Consider using undergarments that might be easier such as camisoles, or front clasp bras. Or put your bra on backwards to clasp it in front, then turn it the proper way.



Bathing:

- Use a tub seat or shower chair to avoid getting up from the bottom of the tub or standing for too long.
- Keep your soaps, shampoos, and other toiletries where you can reach them easily.
- Use 2 in 1 shampoo/conditioner.
- Consider a less frequent routine. For example, you could consider alternating showering and sponge bathing.
- Do not have the water temperature too hot.



Grooming:

- Keep your toiletries such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, or hair brushes together in the place where you use them most often.
- Consider a simple hairstyle and hygiene routine.
- Try an electric toothbrush.



Eating:

- Eat when you have energy.
- Eat smaller portions more often throughout the day.
- Ask for help with cutting food if it's difficult, or try using a rocker knife or pizza cutter.
- Think about the textures of foods. For example, how much more work does it take for you to chew a steak than ground beef?
- Consider eating finger foods — they may be easier to manage than using a fork and knife.



Stairs:

- Organize items to decrease the number of trips up and down the stairs.
- If you can, move items you use often to one level of your home.
- Consider alternate techniques: Go up the stairs leading with your strong leg, one step at a time, and down the stairs leading with your weaker leg, one step at a time. Or you can move sideways so you can hang on to the rail with both hands.



Mobility:

- Move at a comfortable pace.
- Use a bench or walker with a seat to take rest breaks.
- Plan your route to limit walking on days when you are more tired.
- Canes, walkers, and wheelchairs can help save your energy, as well as maintain safety.



Transfers:

Tub:

- Equipment such as bath stools, hand held shower heads, and grab bars can be helpful.



Toilet:

- Consider using raised toilet seats or toilet armrests. It takes less energy to stand up from a higher surface, and you can use your arms and legs to lift yourself.
- Commodes and urinals are available if the bathroom is not on the same floor level of your home or if you have difficulty getting to the toilet.

Bed:

- Try removing the bed and boxspring from the frame if your bed is too tall; or use a bedframe or furniture risers to raise the height if the bed is too short.
- Bedrails are available, as well as a leg lifter device if getting your legs up into bed is difficult.
- Use a log roll technique if it is difficult for you to get out of bed:
 1. While you lay on your back, bend your knees toward your chest.
 2. Roll to one side moving your body and legs at the same time.
 3. Push up off the mattress with your elbow while you drop your feet and legs over the edge of the bed to sit up.



LOG ROLL



SIDE LYING TO SITTING

Chair:

- Furniture risers and firm cushions can raise the height of chairs, which can make it easier to stand up.
- Use the armrests to push yourself up.

Daily Living

Preparing Your Meals

- Organize: collect all the items you will need before you start cooking/baking. A cart with wheels might help. You can gather all the supplies and transport them to the sink, stove, or table.
- Sit to chop or prepare foods.
- Use frozen, canned, or preprepared vegetables and fruits (produce trays) to reduce prep time by half.
- Make casseroles or 'one bowl' recipes.
- Cook larger portions and freeze meals for when your energy levels are low or you don't have a lot of time.
- Use cooking methods such as slow cooking or BBQ so there's less clean-up.



- Make items that take less time to cook like eggs.
- Consider getting prepared foods (fresh or frozen), take out, or Meals on Wheels as options.

Cleaning

- Use a dishwasher, let dishes air dry, or sit to wash the dishes with the cupboard door open so your knees have room.



- Tidy a little each day. You can clean clutter when you are done using it so it doesn't pile up, or clean one room per day.
- Make the bed one side at a time to prevent extra steps or pull the linens up while you're still in bed. Keep your bed away from walls so you can get to each side without moving the bed or reaching. Leave the bed to 'air'- pull the covers back in the morning and up at night when you get in
- Keep cleaning supplies in the rooms where they are used most. Or you can put supplies in a basket so you can easily move them from room to room. Consider using multi-purpose cleaners.
- Use dusters, and sponges with long handles so you don't have to bend or reach as much while you clean.
- Use brooms and vacuums that aren't too heavy.
- Consider items that work on their own such as a robovac, automatic shower spray, or others.

Laundry

- Try doing smaller loads of laundry throughout the week rather than a large weekly wash.
- If laundry is on another level of your house, consider a laundry chute or:
 1. Put your laundry in a pillowcase or bag that ties up.
 2. Throw it down the stairs rather than carrying it.
 3. Put your folded laundry in a backpack to carry it back up the stairs.
- Use of a cart on wheels or suitcase will help distribute laundry to the rooms of the house with less energy, if on one floor.
- Use a table near the dryer for sorting and folding.



- Avoid clothing/linens that need to be ironed. If ironing is necessary, sit to iron.
- If you hang dry your clothes, try to have a clothes rack in a location close to the washer that can remain set up.

Yard Maintenance

- Break up tasks into smaller portions; take breaks when you need them.
- Avoid working in really hot or really cold temperatures.
- Use tools with long handles so you don't need to bend, or kneel. Move items such as water, fertilizer, clippings or weeds with a cart or wheelbarrow to reduce your walking and heavy lifting. Use a kneeling stool or bench to sit while you work.
- Maintain good posture. Consider using raised garden beds or a table to do potting at. Try to change positions often rather than hold the same position for a long period of time.



- Consult a nursery for plants that are easy to care for in your area. Having more perennials than annuals will help reduce the maintenance. Ask a nursery for advice on how to prevent weeds.
- Use a lightweight snow shovel. Push the snow rather than lift it. Shovel more often so snow doesn't pile up. After a heavy snowfall, complete small sections of the walk/driveway and take breaks. Consider using a snow blower.
- Consider hiring or asking for help with yardwork and snow removal, even if it's just once in a while.

Shopping

- Organize: make lists of items you need and plan meals to avoid many trips to the store. Try to organize the grocery list based on the aisle in the grocery store to prevent unnecessary walking.
- Consider using flyers, internet search, or phoning the store ahead of time to check the price and whether items are available. This may save trips to multiple stores.
- Use catalogue or online shopping for gifts, or clothing, and have them delivered to your home. Some grocery stores now offer online orders that they prepare and you pick up. There are also some companies that deliver fresh produce.
- Use a cart rather than a basket in the store. Ask for carry out service. When you bring the groceries home, more frequent but lighter trips from the car to the house may be easier than carrying heavy parcels.



Child Care

- Use your intuition in applying the creative ways you can relate to your children when you are tired.
- Sit to do activities as much as possible, like when you feed babies or toddlers.
- Try to have good body posture while you complete tasks. For example, change diapers from a higher surface such as change table or bed rather than the floor. Bathe the baby in a baby bath on the counter or sink rather than bending to the bathtub.
- Have small children climb up or have someone place them in your lap rather than bending to pick them up.
- Plan creative, low energy activities such as colouring, or boardgames, or helping older children with homework.

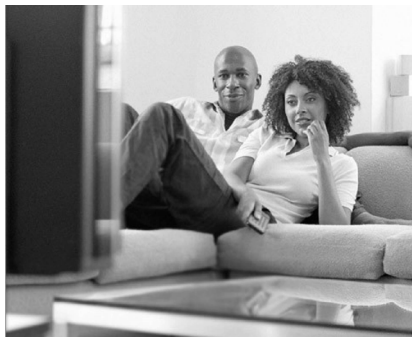


- Indoor play places may be easier environments for you to supervise higher energy play times Encourage older children to be independent and to help with chores, and cleaning up toys.
- Use equipment such as strollers, or shopping carts on outings to save energy.
- Delegate tasks to a helper. Complete the fun, or most important tasks yourself.

Intimacy

Here are some suggestions that might help improve your sexual activity if you are struggling with fatigue. Some of the ideas may be out of your comfort zone. Look through the list and consider the ideas you might be willing to try. Talk to your partner ahead of time, rather than when you are in a sexual moment. Discussion in the moment may cause misunderstanding or hurt feelings.

- Set aside some time to rest or nap before sexual activity
- Plan intimacy for the time when your energy is highest
- Consider sexual positions that are easy on your body and do not need support of both yours or your partner's body weight
- If you are too fatigued, express your affection in ways other than intercourse, such as hugging, kissing, cuddling, or sexual touching
- Low energy may slow the sexual response. You may need more imaginative foreplay, for a longer period of time, to help with arousal.



Other resources about sexuality for cancer patients, including dealing with reduced sexual desire:

- Sexuality and Cancer (Canadian Cancer Society)
- Low Sexual Desire: 10 tips for maintaining sexual desire
- Sexual Health Information for Men with Cancer
- Sexual Health Information for Women with Cancer



Leisure

- Make priorities: activities that bring you joy can energize you. Save your energy for activities most important to you. Plan shorter outings or visits if this is tiring, and plan for times of the day when you have the most energy.
- Use a wheelchair for longer distances, such as shopping or sightseeing. This will help you save your energy. You can also use the wheelchair, cart, or stroller to carry items.
- Use a shoulder rest, headset, or speakerphone while on the telephone.
- Use a book stand to support heavy books.
- When you entertain guests, clean up or prepare the meal a day or two before so you have energy to visit. For less prep, host 'Pot Luck' parties or order take-out.
- Change positions often.
- Sit to complete activities.
- Maintain good posture while you read, write, draw, craft, or watch TV.

For more information on managing cancer-related fatigue, please contact your local Occupational Therapist.

Cross Cancer Institute (Edmonton)

Phone: 780-432-8716

Holy Cross Centre (Calgary)

Phone: 403-698-8169

**Central Alberta Cancer Centre
(Red Deer)**

Please call: 403-406-1963

