

# Mental fatigue and what you can do about it



Princess Margaret

## For patients with mental fatigue

Read this resource to learn:

- What is mental fatigue
- What is a restorative experience
- What else can I do to improve mental fatigue

## What is mental fatigue?

During your cancer treatment, you may sometimes have trouble thinking. This is called mental fatigue. Mental fatigue is a temporary (does not last) trouble or problem. Mental fatigue may make it hard to pay attention or focus on a task.

You may feel mental fatigue after doing work that takes a lot of mental energy. You may feel mental fatigue if you feel a lot of stress for a long period of time.

Often when you feel mental fatigue, your body will feel tired as well.

During diagnosis, treatment and even after treatment you may feel stress from:

- your diagnosis (finding out your illness or condition).
- the decisions you need to make.
- your treatments.
- the need to make plans and solve problems.

It is possible that you will find it hard to:

- pay attention to information you get.
- understand the information you get.
- make decisions and plans.
- solve problems.
- focus your thoughts.
- remember things.

There are certain activities that may help to reduce mental fatigue. These are called restorative experiences.

## What is a restorative experience?

A restorative experience is an activity that helps rest your mind and bring back your mental energy.

A restorative experience usually involves spending time in nature. For example, you could:

- Walk or sit outdoors (backyard, garden, park).
- Look at nature (trees, clouds, sunset).
- Do some gardening.
- Sit by water (ponds, streams, lakes, fountains).
- Watch wildlife (birds, animals).
- Listen to birds or other sounds of nature like a stream or river.

It does not matter what you do. It is more important that you do something that:

- Interests you (so you can start the activity without much work ).
- Is a change from daily routines and concerns (but not watching T.V. or using a computer. Watching T.V. or using a computer tends to take away mental energy).
- Is not boring to you.
- Is fun for you (for example, gardening may be fun and restorative to one person but not to another person).

Try doing restorative activities for:

- 20-30 minutes each day
- 3 days a week

Restorative activities can:

- give you a chance to relax.
- let you be away from everyday life.
- help you forget worries.
- help you reflect on personal matters.

Doing a restorative activity can also help you improve or maintain your attention.

## **What else can I do to improve metal fatigue?**

### **Physical Exercise**

Do a physical exercise program that slowly increases in intensity (the amount of energy it takes to do). This can help with mental fatigue as well as physical fatigue in people with cancer.

### **Take rests**

Take regular breaks and rests from hard activities. This will help you keep your mental and physical levels more stable.

### **Reduce Stress**

Reduce your stress to help manage your fatigue. Doing activities that reduce your stress can help increase your mental energy

If your mental fatigue is caused by stress rather than doing hard mental tasks, here are some activities that can be helpful:

- Exploring and finding out new information about things of interest (by reading, stories, short trips)
- Doing activities for pure enjoyment, such as:
  - Making things (arts and crafts).
  - Collecting things (special objects of interest, for example, spoons, thimbles, rocks, sea shells).

### **Reduce noise**

Reduce noise. It is more tiring to think with noisy distractions (for example, reading with television turned on).