

OHSRC Funded Research Study

Managing Cancer-related Fatigue

Summary “Toolkit”



The following is a shortened summary of the possible interventions contained within the “toolkit” that you will receive on the first visit from your occupational therapist (OT). **It would be useful if you could read through the various topics to see if you have a preference for the sections you would like to discuss with your OT.** In this trial you will have been randomized to either receive one session with an occupational therapist (OT), 3 sessions with an occupational therapist, or one session with an occupational therapy assistant. It is unlikely that there will be time to cover the whole toolkit and all strategies in it, within the time your therapist has with you.

Family and friends involvement

Your friends and family can be useful in helping you to manage your fatigue. It might be that you need to talk to them about how you feel, and what they can do to help. It might be useful to think about what can be delegated to other people and whether tasks can be shared around.

Your energy and fatigue

This section of the manual deals with the idea that you have a fixed amount of available energy to use in your day or week. It discusses several models which can be helpful in understanding your fatigue and thoughts on how to begin to manage it.

Balancing your day and week

There are various things that you need to balance in your day and week. This section deals with some of the things it is important to balance, such as rest and activity, and mental and physical activities. Using daily diaries is a simple method of establishing if you have got balance. Your OT can show you further how to do this.

Your baseline of energy

When you have limited energy it is very tempting to try and use more energy than you have. Your baseline is a level of activity that you can manage without worsening your fatigue. This section deals with this in further depth, looking at how you can find out what your baseline is, and strategies to help you stick to your baseline. By sticking to your baseline you may experience less variation in your fatigue level over time.

Priorities and thinking about how you do things (standards)

If you have limited energy, it is important to use your energy on the things that really matter to you. This section helps you think about your priorities and how you can make sure you are spending your limited energy on the things you really want to. It will ask you some simple questions to help you think about what your priorities are. This section also deals with “standards” (how often and how well we do things) and encourages you to make sure that your standards are not forcing you to spend more energy on activities than you really want to.

Keeping energy in reserve (the 75% rule)

The 75% rule is about making sure that you keep some energy in your day for things that you haven't planned for. Rather than using all your energy on each thing you do, you save 25% each time. This means you have some energy in reserve. Your OT can explain further how the 75% rule could help you to manage your fatigue and possibly have spare energy for things that may crop up outside of your plan.

Rest and relaxation

Before you were ill you may have found such things as gardening, watching TV, and reading relaxing. These things may no longer work for you in this way. This section looks at how stress and anxiety may affect you, and what may now help you relax. Your OT can teach you breathing and relaxation techniques which some people find helpful. Relaxation used in the right way can also be a useful tool to expand your available energy in a day.

Sleep

Having a bad night of sleep may significantly affect your fatigue level. This section looks at basic sleep problems; what affects your sleep and what can you do to improve it. The better sleep you get, the more energy you are likely to have.

Managing your activity

Most people do things in a certain way because they have always done it in that way, or because their parents told them to do it that way! This section shows you a simple process which you can apply to anything you are doing to make sure that you are doing it in the most energy efficient way. If you can save energy by doing something in a different way, it may give you spare energy for other things.

Planning your day or week

You may not be used to particularly planning what you do in your day, or if you are a planner you may be finding now that you are unable to achieve all that you have planned due to your fatigue. This section shows you some simple strategies to help you plan appropriately for the energy you have. It may also help you stick to your baselines and make sure you have balance in your life. In turn this could help you manage your fatigue better.

Warning signs

In this section your OT will help you discover more clearly what your body is telling you. Your body will usually tell you when you are beginning to do too much; these are called warning signs. By learning to listen to these signs it is often possible to stop before you have over done it; therefore learning to manage your fatigue and energy more wisely.

Using equipment to conserve energy

This section introduces you to some items of equipment that may help in reducing the amount of energy you use in carrying out tasks in your day. For example, simply using a high stool or perching stool to sit on when you are washing dishes may reduce the energy you use in doing this job by about 25% compared to if you were to stand to do the same task.

Conclusion

Your OT is unlikely to be able to discuss all of the sections above in depth. However, she will try to ensure you have the best strategies to help you manage your fatigue.

Before your OT visits you try to have a think about the key areas you would like to discuss.