Radiation Therapy – Fatigue

Fatigue is a common side effect of radiation therapy. It is a signal from your body, telling you that you need to rest. You may need extra rest to help heal the tissues in your body affected by the radiation. It is important you get enough good, quality rest while undergoing any treatment for cancer.

Fatigue gradually increases over the first two weeks or so of treatment and continues throughout the course of therapy. It gradually disappears once treatment is over. Most patients see improvement four to six weeks after the completion of radiation. The fatigue may be worse if you are receiving treatment to a large area of your body, receiving or have received chemotherapy, traveling long distances every day for your treatment, or trying to continue working a job while you receive treatment.

Ways to improve energy level and feelings of well-being:

• If you are tired, then rest. Many patients require a nap in the daytime. However, if you are having trouble sleeping at night, try not to nap in the daytime, or limit it to 30 minutes.
• Pace yourself. Do activities you like to do, but try not to do so much that you become overtired. In general, you are encouraged to maintain your normal lifestyle as much as possible.
• Eat a well-balanced diet. Weight loss during treatment may contribute to fatigue and other side effects. Ask us if you have any nutritional questions.
• Drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration can make you weak.

During times of extreme fatigue, consider these ideas:

• If cooking is a chore, try Meals on Wheels.
• Get outside help with household duties and child care.
• If working, cut back on your hours.

Alert your doctor or nurse in Radiation Oncology if you feel your fatigue is severe or overwhelming. With the help of our dietitian and social worker, we can look for ways to help you through this time.