

The Southampton Press

October 22, 2020

CANCER JOURNEYS

A Twice-a-month column from
Fighting Chance

The Mysteries of Cancer Fatigue



Diagnosis

Emotional Impact

Treatment/Side Effects

Survivorship

Patient Stories

Interference with Normal Life

Cancer fatigue--also called “cancer-related fatigue”--is the #1 complaint of cancer patients in terms of factors interfering with their efforts to lead the semblance of a normal life.

Trying to Define “Cancer Fatigue”

At Fighting Chance, where we have provided counseling to thousands of cancer patients during the past 18 years, we often hear about a patient’s sense of exhaustion, which comes on suddenly, is not related to a burst of exercise or other exertion, and continues to grip the patient even after a good night’s sleep.

The Onset of Cancer Fatigue

Cancer fatigue remains puzzling even to oncologists because it is not, strictly speaking, just a “side effect” of one of the treatments for cancer.

One of the studies show that when patients are first diagnosed, about 40% already are complaining about

cancer fatigue--making the condition more akin to a symptom of the disease, just as rapid weight loss can be a symptom or tell-tale sign of cancer’s commencement.

The Condition is More Widespread Once the Treatment Begins

Once patients begin conventional treatments, like chemotherapy, studies show that over 80% complain about cancer fatigue; in other words fatigue becomes more widespread as efforts are made to put cancer into remission.

Causes – Multiple and Mysterious

When patients complain about cancer fatigue at Fighting Chance, our first job is simply to explain the condition, including the inability of scientists to agree on a single specific cause.

There also is a body of scientific thought which attributes cancer fatigue to a virtual constellation of almost every adverse condition that accompanies a cancer diagnosis and its multiple treatments.

Management of Cancer Fatigue

The website of the American Cancer Society, always a source of learned and thoughtful recommendations, says that the three most effective ways of reducing cancer-related fatigue are: #1 Exercise, #2 Counseling and #3 Yoga.

Walking a couple of miles every day is something almost all patient survivors can accomplish.

Next there is counseling, which should be with a licensed clinical social worker or “LCSW” – the highly credentialed professionals we employ at Fighting Chance.

As for yoga, we have a free program twice a week at Yoga Shanti in Sag Harbor.

Fighting Chance has offices in
Sag Harbor and at the
Phillips Family Cancer Center
in Southampton.

For more details, or information
please call 631 725 4646.

Visit our website at
www.fightingchance.org