



# Brain Tumour Australia Information

## © FACT SHEET 40

### Depression & Fatigue

#### The Brain — Depression

**Depression** may be a sign of progress if the depression is a reaction to an awareness of one's circumstances. In this situation depression can be a result of coming to terms with the serious nature of the diagnosis, treatment and prognosis.

Depression may be evident by behaviour, showing a:

- Depressed mood (either subjective report or observation of others)
- Lack of interest in life (all or most activities) - a loss of motivation.
- Insomnia (lack of sleep) or the desire to sleep too much.
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Withdrawal from sexual activity.
- Physical agitation.
- Feelings of worthlessness and excessive and Inappropriate guilt
- Problems thinking or concentrating and indecisiveness.
- Change in appetite (medication, treatment, or the part of the brain with tumour involvement can be an influence here)
- Mood swing or flattened no-emotion affect
- Hypersensitivity to noise, activity or light
- Recurrent thoughts of death (and possibly suicidal thoughts).

#### Depression

**If you are the person diagnosed with a tumour**

##### Helpful hints/tips/strategies

- Set goals
- Try relaxation, meditation
- Exercise
- Build on existing areas of skill and interest
- Seek professional help
- Try counselling
- Medication prescribed by your doctor may assist during the crisis stage

**If you are a family member**

##### Helpful hints/tips/strategies

- Be aware that traditional forms of counselling which depend on memory, planning, clear thinking and self awareness may not be helpful

- Set realistic goals
- Encourage activity
- Be aware of person's limits
- Ask for professional assistance

#### The Brain- Fatigue

Fatigue occurs in 14% to 96% of people with brain tumours, especially those receiving treatment for their diagnosis. Fatigue is complex, and has biological, psychological, and behavioural causes. Fatigue is difficult to describe and people with a brain tumour may express it in different ways, such as saying they feel tired, weak, exhausted, weary, worn-out, heavy, or slow. Health professionals may use terms such as asthenia, fatigue, lassitude, prostration, exercise intolerance, lack of energy, and weakness to describe fatigue.

Fatigue can be described as a condition that causes distress and decreased ability to function due to a lack of energy. Specific symptoms may be physical, psychological, or emotional. To be treated effectively, fatigue related to brain tumours and treatment needs to be distinguished from other kinds of fatigue.

Fatigue may be acute or chronic. Acute fatigue is normal tiredness with occasional symptoms that begin quickly and last for a short time. Rest may alleviate fatigue and allow a return to a normal level of functioning in a healthy individual, but this ability is diminished in people who have cancer. Chronic fatigue is long lasting. Chronic fatigue syndrome describes prolonged debilitating fatigue that may persist or relapse.

#### Causes

Fatigue can commonly be an indicator of disease progression. Tumours can cause fatigue directly or indirectly by causing anaemia, and by forming toxic substances in the body that interfere with normal cell functions. People who are having problems breathing, another symptom of some brain tumours, may also experience fatigue.



# Brain Tumour Australia Information

## © FACT SHEET 41

### Fatigue cont.

#### The Brain- Fatigue cont.

##### Causes

The extreme stress that people with a brain tumour experience over a long period of time can cause them to use more energy, leading to fatigue. The central nervous system CNS -the brain and spinal cord, may be affected by the diagnosis or the treatment can cause fatigue. Medication to treat pain, depression, vomiting, seizures, and other problems related to brain tumours may also cause fatigue.

Tumour necrosis factor (TNF) is a substance that can be produced by a tumour, TNF may cause a decrease in protein stores in muscles causing the body to work harder to perform normal functions, and therefore causing fatigue. There are many chemical, physical, and behavioural factors that are thought to cause fatigue.

##### Factors Related to Fatigue

It is not always possible to determine the factors that cause fatigue in patients with a brain tumour.

Possible factors include the following:

- Treatment.
- Anaemia.
- Medications.
- Weight gain/loss and loss of appetite.
- Changes in metabolism.
- Decreased levels of hormones.
- Emotional distress.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Inactivity.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Loss of strength and muscle coordination.
- Pain.
- Infection.
- Having other medical conditions in addition to a brain tumour.

##### Brain Tumour treatment & Fatigue

Fatigue is a common symptom following radiation therapy or chemotherapy. It may be caused by anaemia, or the collection of toxic substances produced by cells.

In the case of radiation, it may be caused by the increased energy needed to repair damaged skin tissue.

Fatigue may be acute or chronic. Acute fatigue is normal

tiredness with occasional symptoms that begin quickly and last for a short time. Rest may alleviate fatigue and allow a return to a normal level of functioning in a healthy individual, but this ability is diminished in people who have cancer. Chronic fatigue is long lasting. Chronic fatigue syndrome describes prolonged debilitating fatigue that may persist or relapse.

Several factors have been linked with fatigue caused by chemotherapy.

Some people may respond to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer with mood changes and disrupted sleep patterns. Nausea, vomiting, chronic pain, and weight gain/loss can also cause fatigue.

Fatigue has long been associated with radiation therapy although the connection between them is not well understood.

Fatigue usually lessens after the therapy is completed, although not all patients return to their normal level of energy. Patients who are older, have advanced disease, or receive combination therapy (for example, chemotherapy plus radiation therapy) are at a higher risk for developing long-term fatigue.

Many people with brain tumours undergo surgery for diagnosis or treatment.

Fatigue is a problem following surgery, but fatigue from surgery improves with time. It can be made worse, however, when combined with the fatigue caused by other treatments