



Managing Fatigue

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“The mere thought of getting out of bed can be too much”

“Feels as if you are inside a glass jar”

“You keep waiting for the lab test results, that makes you tired”



“Like having the flu”

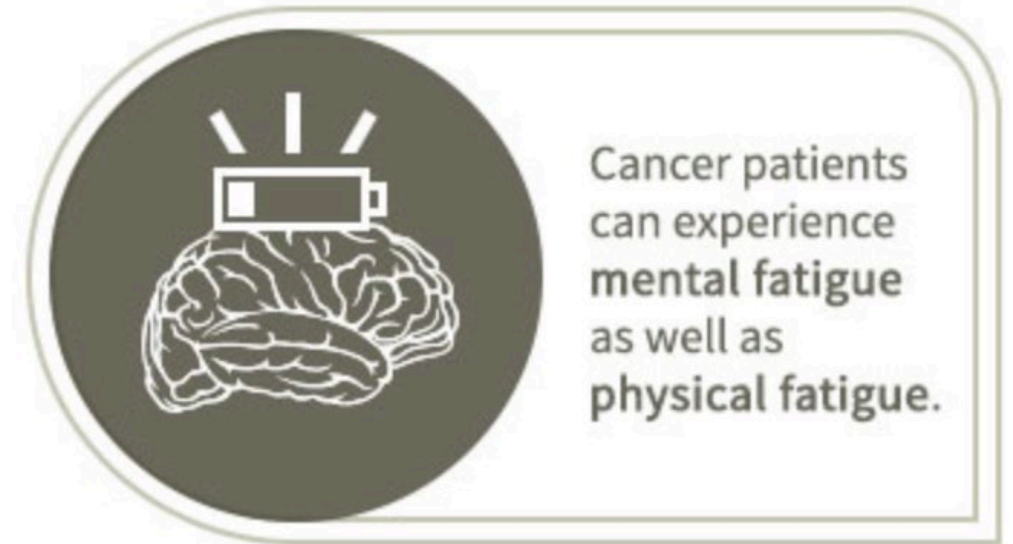
“You feel like a block of concrete”

“It’s invisible to others”

What is cancer-related fatigue?

Physical, emotional, and mental feeling of tiredness or exhaustion in someone with cancer

- Unrelated to recent activity
- Does not improve with rest/sleep
- More intense and severe than other kinds of fatigue



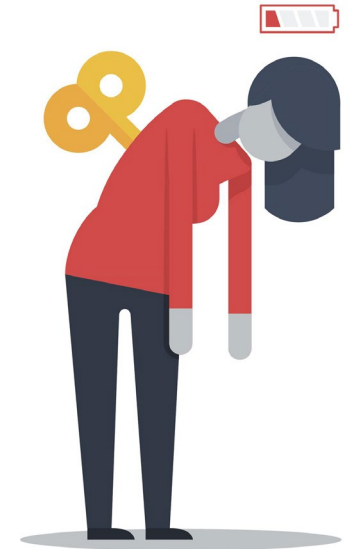
What is cancer-related fatigue?

Primary fatigue: Directly related to cancer disease and treatments

- Body energy use increases while fighting cancer cells, cell metabolism changes
- Energy is used to repair cells damaged by treatment

Secondary fatigue: Other factors experienced during the cancer experience

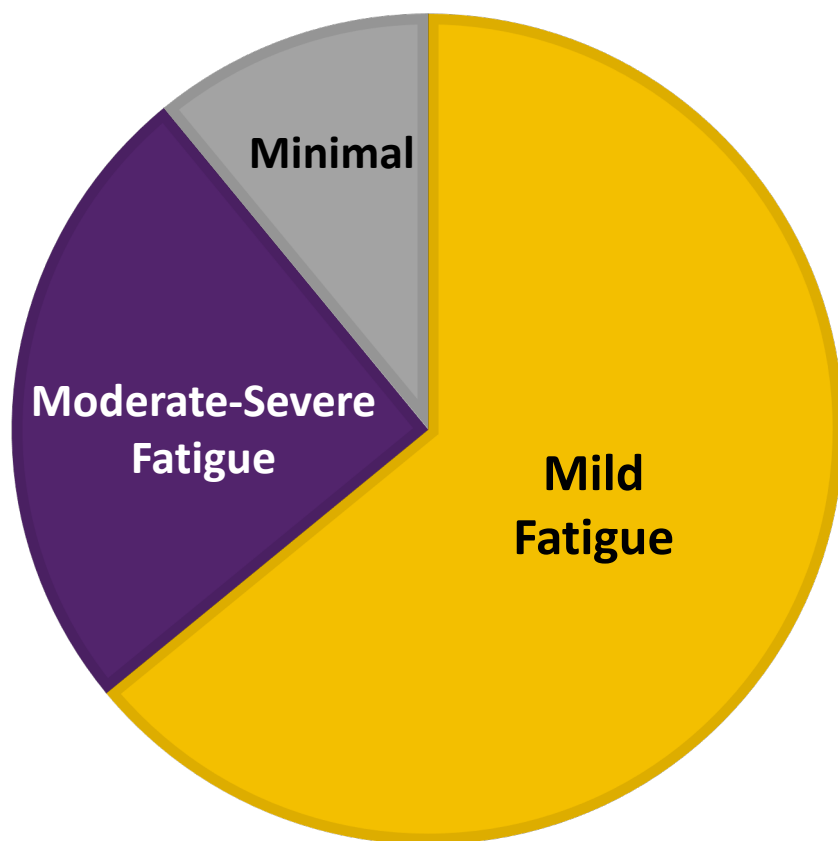
- Pain, depression, anxiety
- Sleep problems (e.g., sleep apnea)
- Hormone imbalances
- Nutrition changes, dehydration, nausea/vomiting
- Anemia
- Other health conditions, medication side effects



Contributors to Fatigue in Cancer



Cancer Fatigue Facts



- Often most distressing symptom in cancer
 - 9 of 11 cancer groups rated fatigue as most concerning/distressing
- 20 to 82% of cancer survivors experience mild-to-moderate fatigue up to one year or more after treatment
- Fatigue can be an invisible symptom that often is misinterpreted by friends, families, and medical professionals
 - Many patients under-report fatigue

Management Strategies for Fatigue



Managing Fatigue

1. **Consistent physical activity**: strongest evidence for cancer-related fatigue
2. **Pacing**: take regular breaks to minimize impacts of fatigue
3. **Managing other factors**: sleep, mood/stress, nutrition





Tracking Your Fatigue

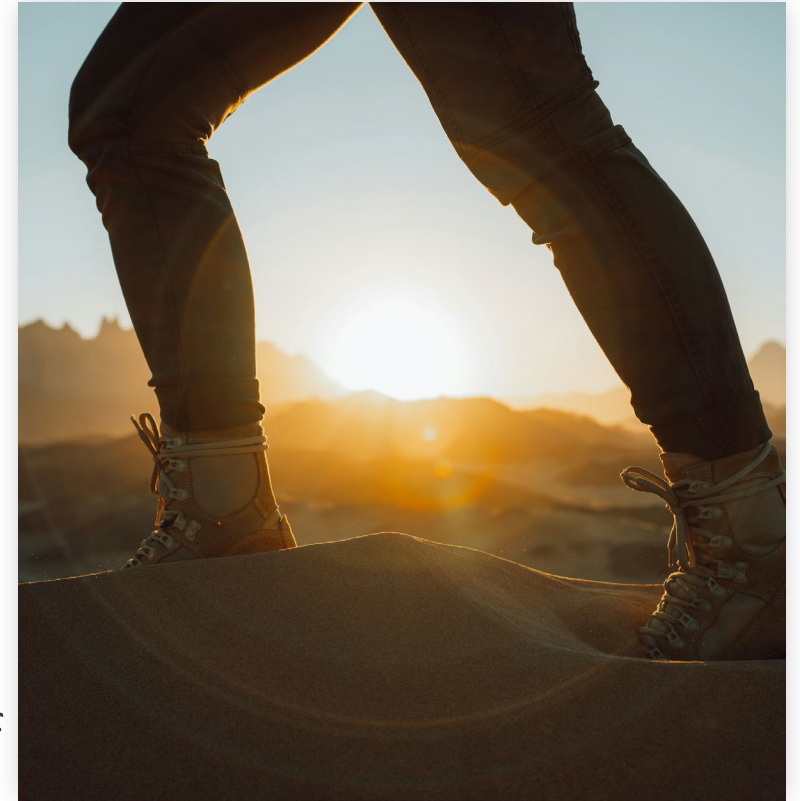
- Be prepared to talk about fatigue with your medical team at every appointment
- Look for your own patterns in fatigue (journals/diaries can help identify patterns)
 - Consider tracking fatigue (0-10 scale) along with other factors (especially mood/stress, sleep quality,

Consistent Physical Activity Strategies



Managing Fatigue: Consistent Physical Activity

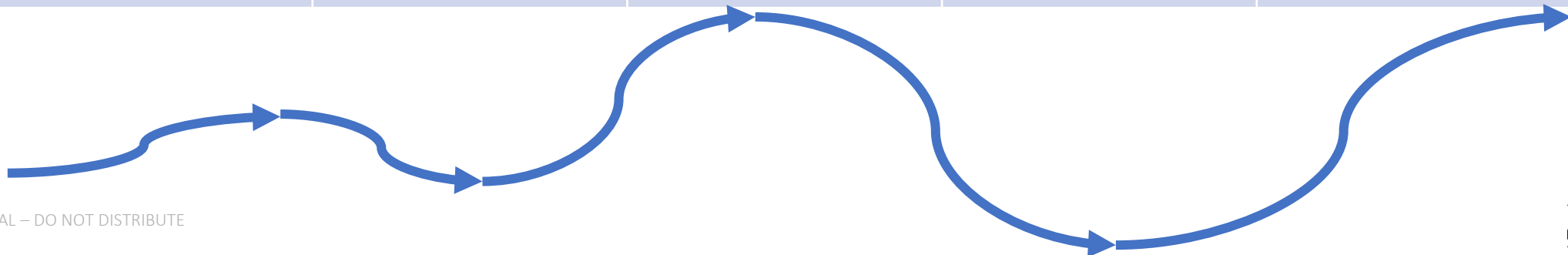
- For cancer-related fatigue, the mindset that “more is better” can exacerbate fatigue
 - On your best energy days: Do not go above set goals, even if you feel you have enough energy
 - On your worst energy days: Try to meet some level of activity



INconsistent Physical Activity Example

- **Example**: Charlene has set a goal to walk 20 minutes daily, which is about her maximum amount of energy most days

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Charlene walks 20 minutes	Charlene is tired from Monday, decides to walk only 10 minutes	Charlene walks 20 minutes, but feels great and walks an additional 15 minutes	Charlene is exhausted, decides to take a day off	Charlene walks for 30 minutes to make up for missing Thursday



Consistent Physical Activity Example

- **Example**: Charlene has set a goal to walk 15 minutes daily

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Charlene walks 15 minutes	Charlene walks 15 minutes	Charlene walks 15 minutes	Charlene walks 15 minutes	Charlene walks 15 minutes



What physical activities are helpful for fatigue?



- Evidence-based activities include aerobic exercise, resistance exercise, or a combination
 - **Aerobic:** walking, running, cycling, swimming
 - **Resistance:** free weights, resistance bands, etc.
- Yoga and Tai Chi evidence is less strong, but may be helpful for some

Suggestions for Starting a Physical Activity Regimen

- Use the “75% rule” for setting activity goals:

Your Ability for an Activity	Goal
Swimming for 1 hour	Swimming for 45-minutes
Walking for 20-minutes	Walking for 15-minutes
40 Resistance Band Reps	30 Resistance Band Reps
Standing for 60 seconds	Standing for 45 seconds

- Stop when you have met your stated goal, every time.

Suggestions for Starting a Physical Activity Regimen



- Increase activity only slowly over time and at pre-planned intervals, or stay consistent
 - Example: 10% increase in amount of daily activity each month
- For extreme fatigue (if you experience days where you feel you cannot get out of bed):
 - Consider professional consultation (Primary care, Rehab Medicine, Physical therapy)
 - Consider goals that are within your abilities
 - Set goals that are related to initiating activities (getting shoes on, stepping outside)

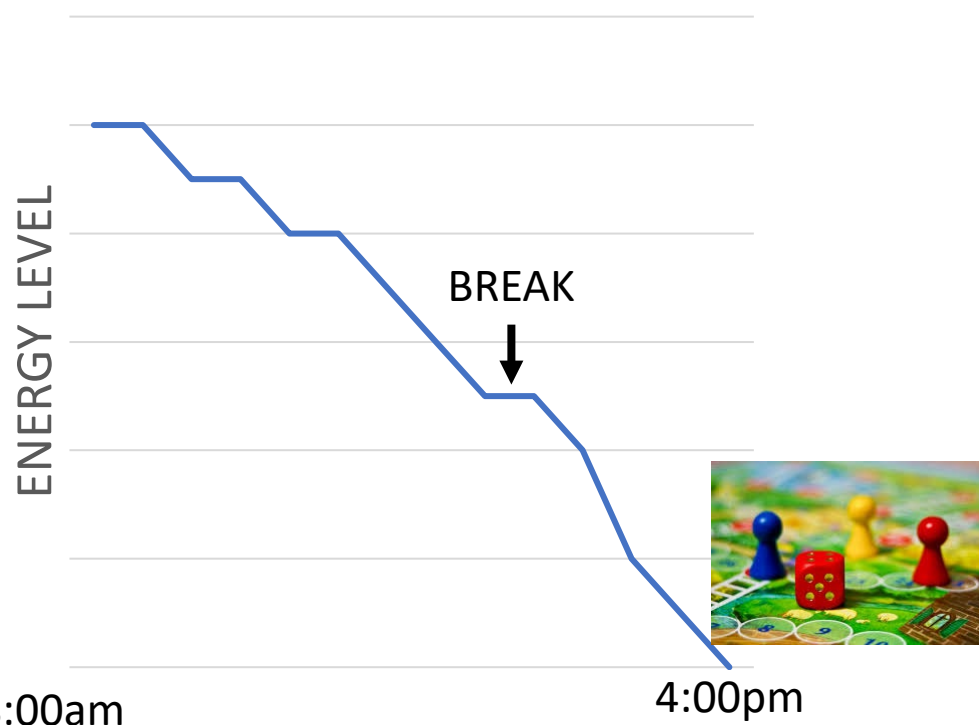
Pacing



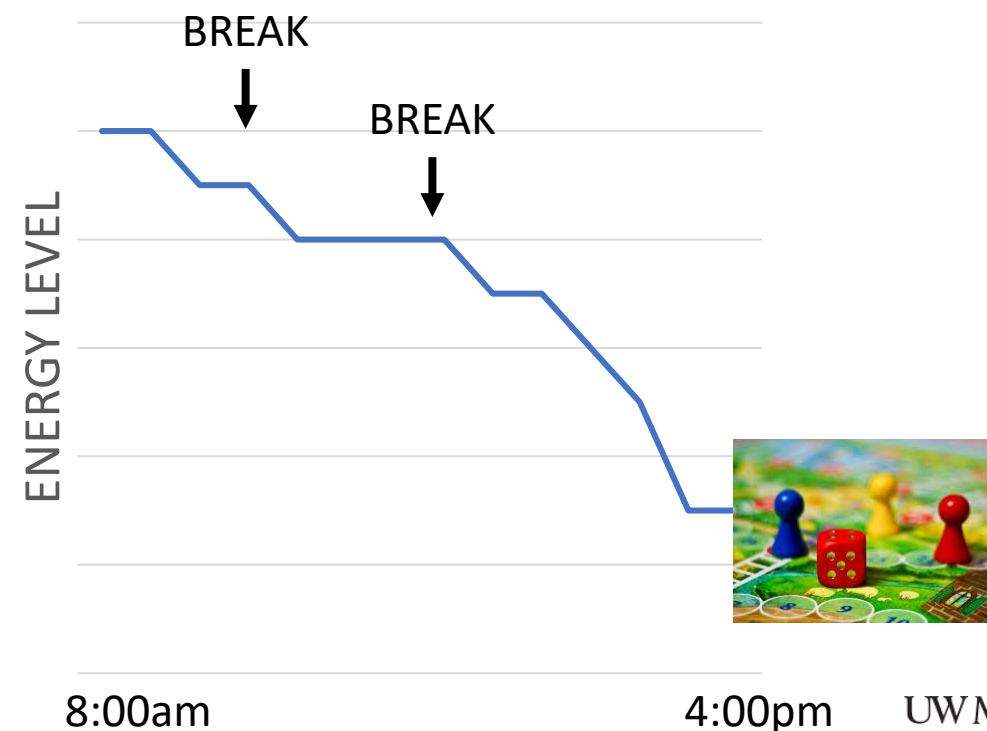
What is pacing?

- Taking breaks before your body/brain has worsened fatigue

Not Pacing



Pacing





Pacing: Strategies



Time-based pacing

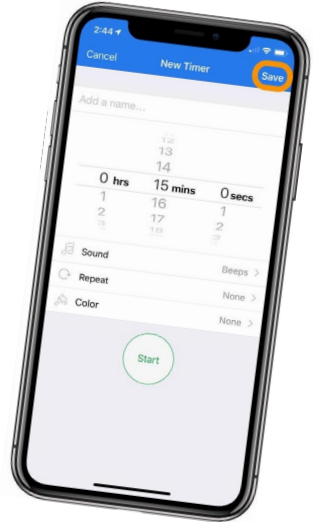


Goal based pacing

Time-Based Pacing

For tasks you tend to **overdo**:

- 1) Do a task for a safe amount of time
- 2) Rest for a set amount of time
- 3) Repeat steps 1 and 2 until the task is complete



Goal-Based Pacing

For activities/goals that you tend to **overdo**:



- 1) Break the activity/goal down into reasonable steps
- 2) Complete one step of the activity/goal
- 3) Take a break to rest
- 4) Repeat steps 2 and 3 until activity/goal is complete



Pacing: Danger Times

When you could be at risk of NOT pacing yourself

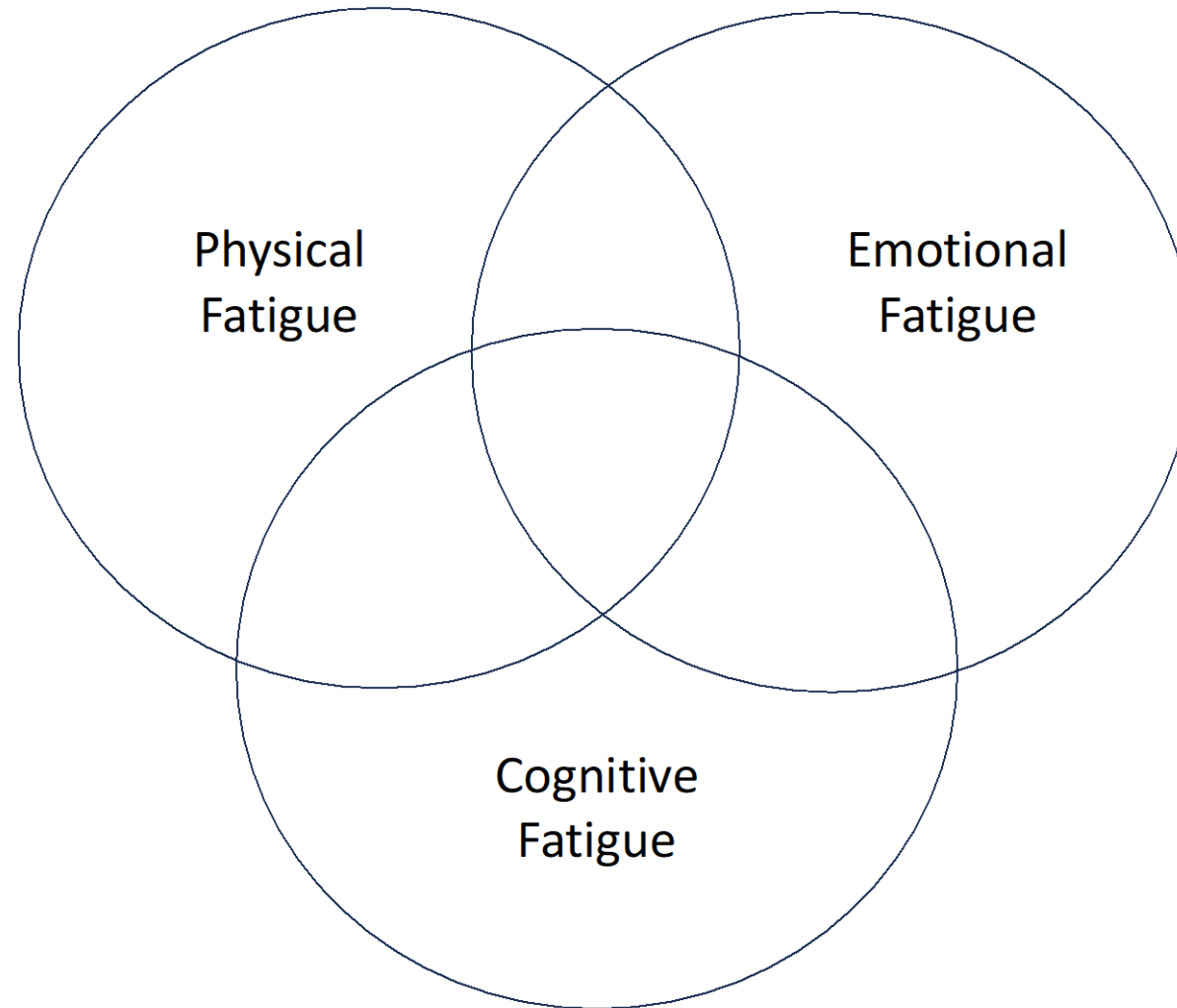
1. Days when you feel good
2. When trying to please other people
3. When feeling rushed or pressured
4. When competing with other people
5. When doing an activity you enjoy



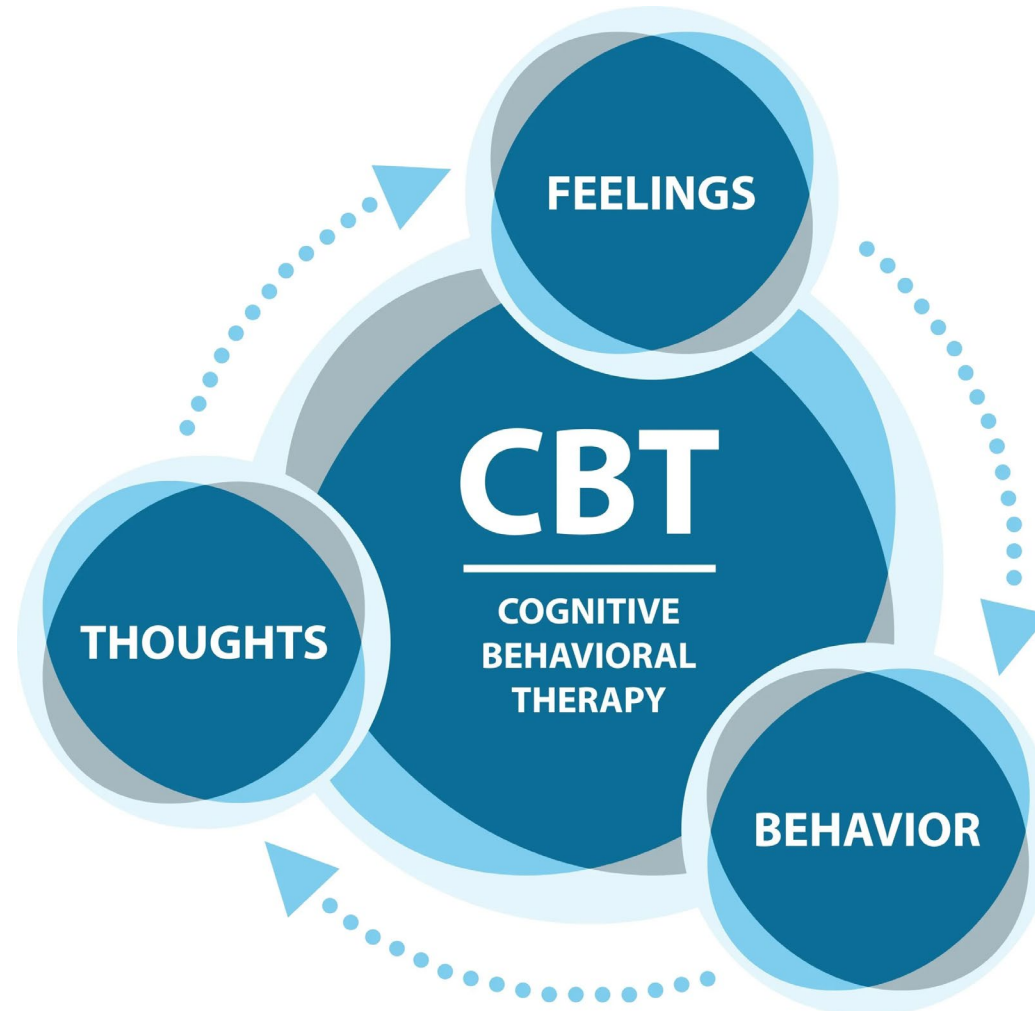
Managing Other Factors That Contribute to Fatigue



Managing Cancer-related Fatigue: Other Strategies

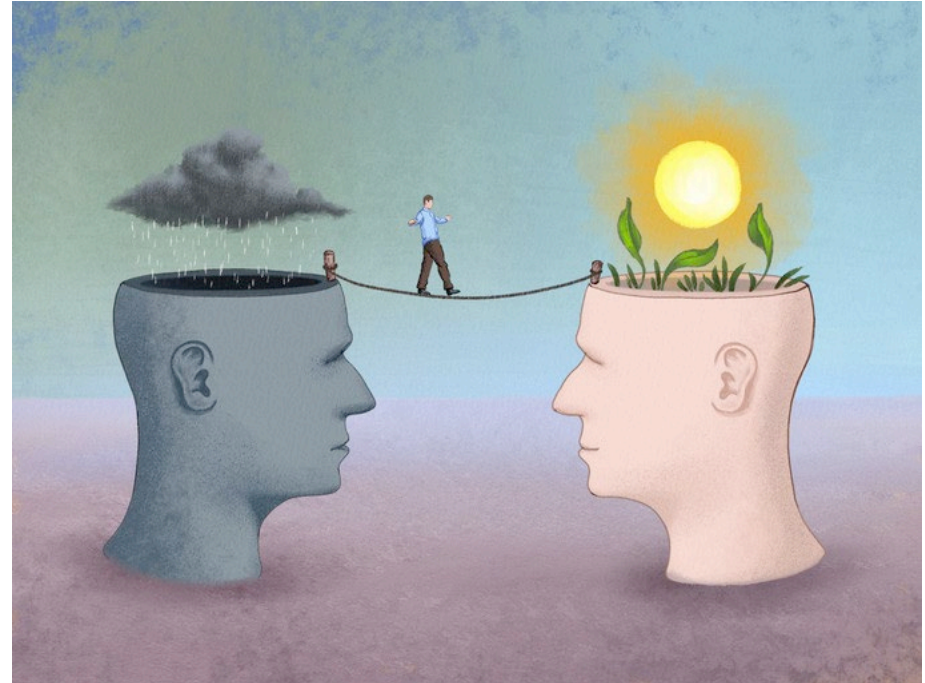


Mood and Stress Management



Managing Mood and Stress with Behaviors

- Physical activity (same as fatigue management!)
- Diaphragmatic breathing, paced breathing, etc.
- Meditation
- Mindfulness – grounding exercises, body scans
- Journaling – writing a fear narrative
- Yoga
- Additional treatment of mood (example: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy)





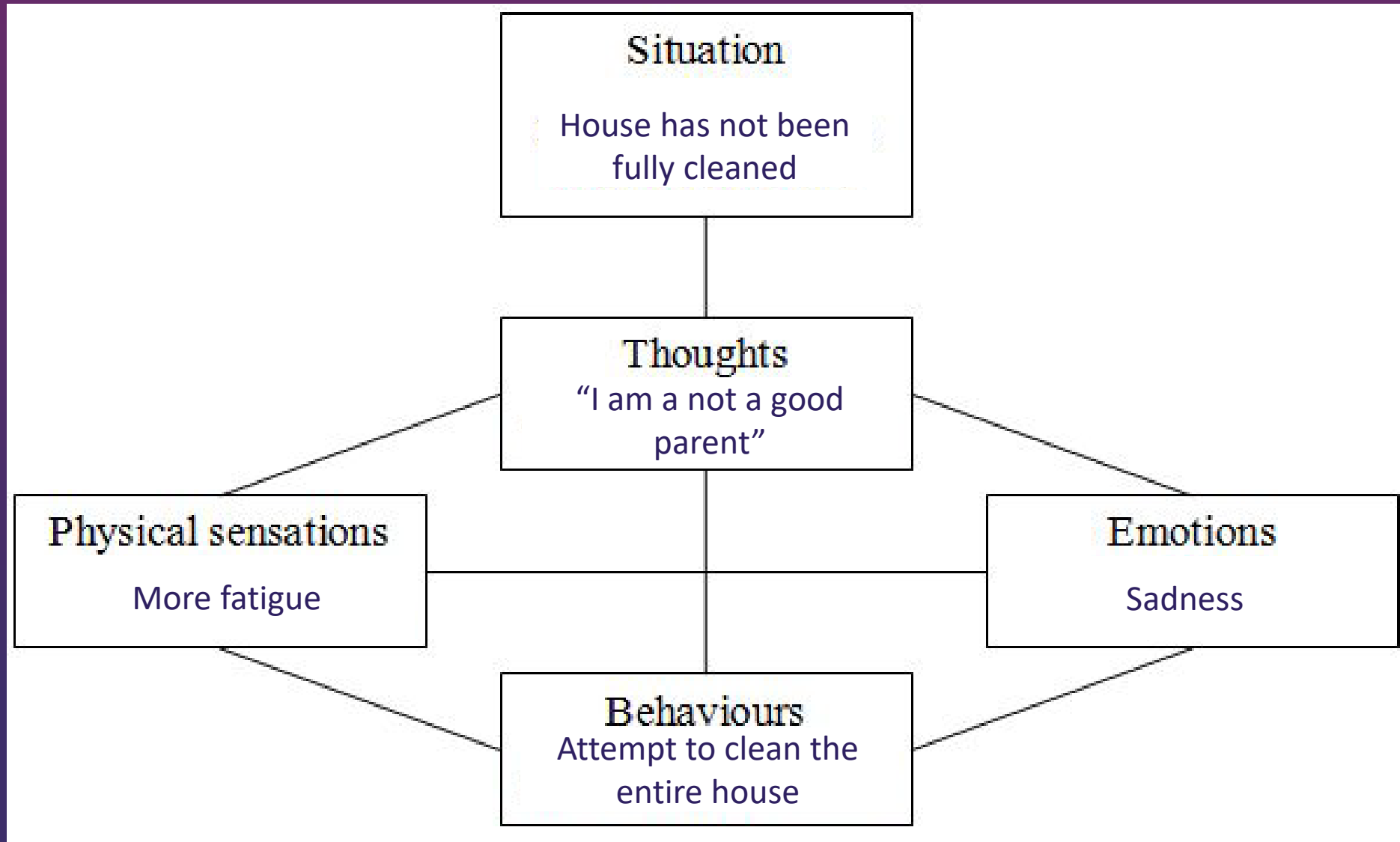
Managing Mood/Stress with Thoughts

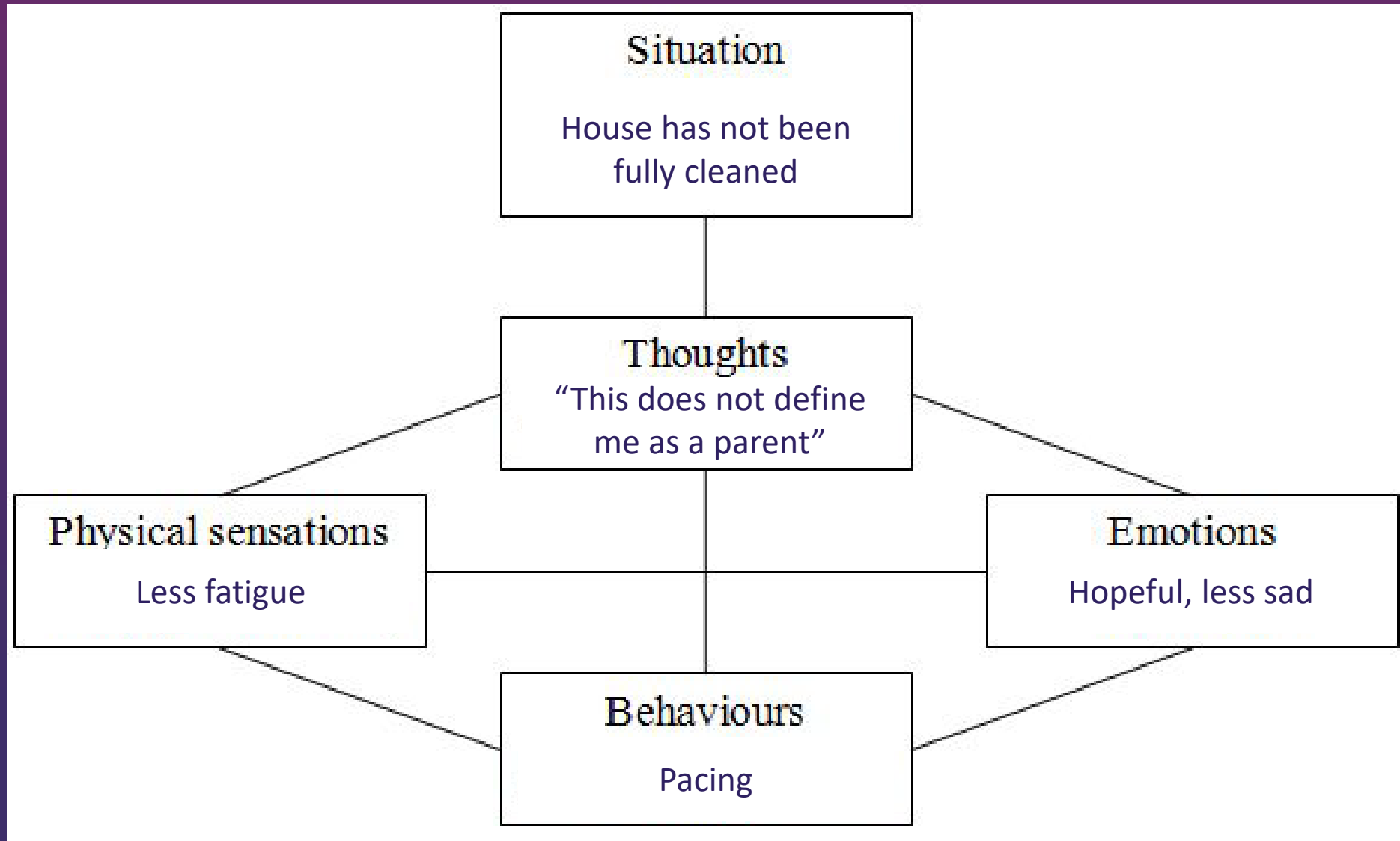
- **Unhelpful thinking:**

- “If I don’t complete this task it reflects on my ability as a parent”
- “I am lazy if I don’t push through and complete this task”
- “I am giving-in if I take a break”

- **Helpful thinking:**

- “Completing this task does not define me as a parent”
- “My fatigue is worse today and I need to break down this task into steps”
- “Taking breaks will allow me to get more done”





Sleep Hygiene

- Keep a consistent schedule
- Give yourself 20-30 minutes to fall asleep, then get out of bed to perform a quiet activity in low light. Return to bed when sleepy and repeat as needed.
- Nap or not to nap?
 - Sleep is like a hunger—eating a snack before a big meal can impact our appetite
- Minimize caffeine use in afternoon/evening, avoid alcohol before bedtime, turn off electronics 30 minutes before bed



Additional Steps to Address Fatigue Cognitive Difficulties

- **Work with medical team to treat risk factors for fatigue**
 - Anemia, sleep apnea, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, thyroid dysfunction
 - Attend the nutrition talk later today!
- **Talk with your doctor about additional workup**
 - This could include meeting with Rehabilitation Medicine providers (MD, Rehabilitation Psychology, Physical Therapy)
 - There is mixed evidence for use of stimulant medications and other meds for supporting fatigue, but effects are modest (may not be as effective as behavioral strategies already discussed) and can have side effects

Where to Start: Supporting Fatigue



1. Track fatigue and other symptoms
2. Start an achievable, consistent physical activity routine
3. Use pacing by setting breaks early in the day
4. Regularly practice stress/mood management strategies
5. Practice sleep hygiene
6. Talk with your medical team about fatigue

Resources: Fatigue in Cancer Survivorship



- **National Cancer Institute**

- <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/fatigue>

- **American Cancer Society**

- <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/fatigue-weakness-sleep/fatigue.html>

QUESTIONS?

