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# **FATIGUE RECOVERY TOOLKIT**

# The Fatigue Recovery Roadmap

Cancer-related fatigue is real, multi-layered, and deeply personal. It's not caused by one single thing and it's not something you can simply "push through." This roadmap outlines the six core drivers of fatigue after cancer and shows a gentle, structured path toward reclaiming your energy. Use this as a guide, a reference, and a source of clarity as you move forward at your own pace. Here are the six drivers of cancer-related fatigue.



## 1. Hormonal Shifts

Cancer treatment can disrupt thyroid function, estrogen, testosterone, cortisol, and more. Even small shifts can make energy feel unpredictable, heavy, or flat.



## 2. Metabolic & Glucose Imbalance

Chemotherapy, steroids and hormone therapies for breast and prostate cancer can alter how the body uses glucose. Blood sugar swings amplify fatigue dramatically.



## 3. Sleep Disturbances

Night sweats, anxiety, menopausal changes, pain, and disrupted sleep cycles make restorative sleep harder — even when you "sleep for hours."



## 4. Emotional Load

Fear of recurrence, grief, anxiety, and depression all drain mental and physical energy. Emotional recovery is biological recovery.



## 5. Inflammation & Immune Repair

Treatment triggers inflammation, which the body continues repairing long after treatment ends. This repair process uses enormous energy.



## 6. Deconditioning & Muscle Loss

Cancer treatment often reduces muscle mass, lowers mitochondria function, and makes everyday tasks feel harder — months or years later.

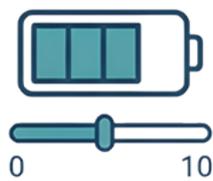
# Symptom Tracker & Daily Energy Log

Fatigue after cancer is influenced by many factors – sleep, mood, hormones, stress, movement, and daily routines. Tracking your symptoms can help you recognize patterns, understand what affects your energy, and prepare clearer conversations with your healthcare team.

This tracker is not diagnostic – it is simply a supportive tool for clarity and self-awareness.

## 1. DAILY ENERGY LOG

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Overall Energy (0–10):

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

(0 = completely depleted, 10 = best energy)



### Sleep Check-In

Hours slept: \_\_\_\_\_

Sleep quality:

Very poor  Poor  Fair  Good  Very good

Morning feeling:

- Refreshed
- Somewhat rested
- Still tired
- Exhausted



### Meals + Energy Notes

(You don't need to log exact foods – just how meals affected you.)

Breakfast:

Energy afterwards:  Crash  Stable  Improved

Lunch:

Energy afterwards:  Crash  Stable  Improved

Dinner:

Energy afterwards:  Crash  Stable  Improved

Snacks / cravings / hunger changes:



### Movement / Activity:

(Anything counts — gentle stretch, walk, chores, etc.)

- None today
- Light movement (1-10 minutes)
- Moderate movement
- More activity than usual

How did movement affect you?

- Boosted energy
- No change
- Made me more tired
- Not sure



### Mood + Emotional Check-In:

- Calm
- Stressed
- Anxious
- Low mood
- Irritable
- Hopeful
- Mixed

Notes:



### Symptoms I Noticed Today:

- Brain fog
- Headaches
- Hot flashes/night sweats
- Palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Digestive changes
- Pain
- Tingling/neuropathy
- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Emotional overwhelm
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



### Triggers / Notable Events:

(anything that seemed to affect energy)

- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Overexertion
- Busy day
- Heavy meal
- Heat/cold
- Emotional event
- Treatment side effect
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:



### What Helped Today:

- Short rest
- Gentle movement
- Breathing/relaxation
- Social support
- Balanced meals
- Hydration
- Routine/structure
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



### My Small Win Today:

(It can be tiny — showing up counts.)



## 2. WEEKLY OVERVIEW PAGE

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

Average energy this week:

- 0-2  3-4  5-6  7-8  9-10

Most common symptoms this week:

Things that improved your energy:

Things that drained your energy:

Sleep patterns you noticed:

Mood patterns you noticed:

Movement patterns you noticed:

## 3. PATTERNS + INSIGHTS PAGE

Over the past month...



### ✓ Energy Patterns

- Times of day you feel best: \_\_\_\_\_
- Times of day you feel worst: \_\_\_\_\_
- Days of the week that tend to be hardest: \_\_\_\_\_



### ✓ Symptom Patterns

- Symptoms that appear repeatedly: \_\_\_\_\_
- Symptoms that appear only with certain triggers: \_\_\_\_\_



### ✓ Potential Triggers

- Stress
- Sleep loss
- Menopause/hormone shifts
- Meal timing
- Large meals
- Lack of movement
- Overexertion
- Weather/temperature
- Emotional events
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



### ✓ Helpful Supports

- What consistently improves fatigue: \_\_\_\_\_
- What worsens fatigue: \_\_\_\_\_



### ✓ Notes to Discuss With Your Care Team

(Use this section to advocate for yourself during appointments.)



# Hormone Clarity Checklist

## How to Use This Checklist

Cancer treatments can affect several hormone systems in the body – sometimes in subtle ways that standard tests don't fully capture.

This checklist helps you identify patterns, understand what might be contributing to fatigue, and prepare questions to bring to your clinicians.

You do not need to check every box.

This is simply a tool for clarity and self-advocacy.

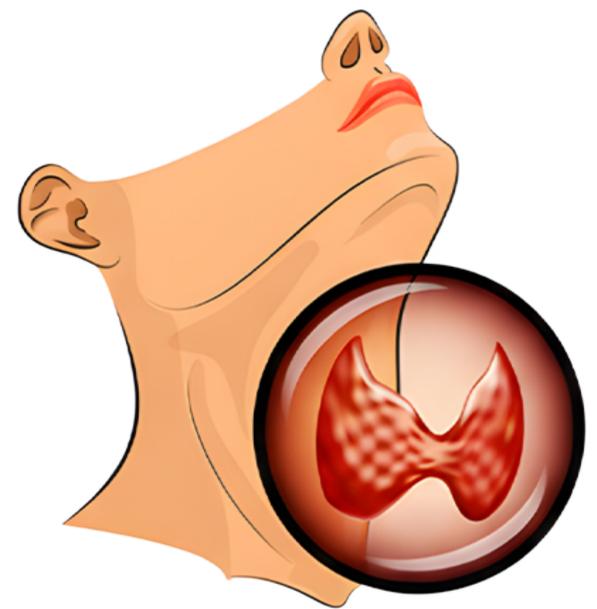
## 1. Thyroid Clarity Check

### Common symptoms survivors notice:

- Feeling unusually cold
- Fatigue that doesn't improve with rest
- Dry skin or brittle hair
- Brain fog or slow thinking
- New or unexpected weight changes
- Mood changes (low mood, irritability)
- Slower digestion or constipation

### Useful questions to ask your care team:

- "Could my symptoms be related to my thyroid?"
- "Would it be helpful to review my thyroid function tests?"
- "What patterns should I watch for between visits?"



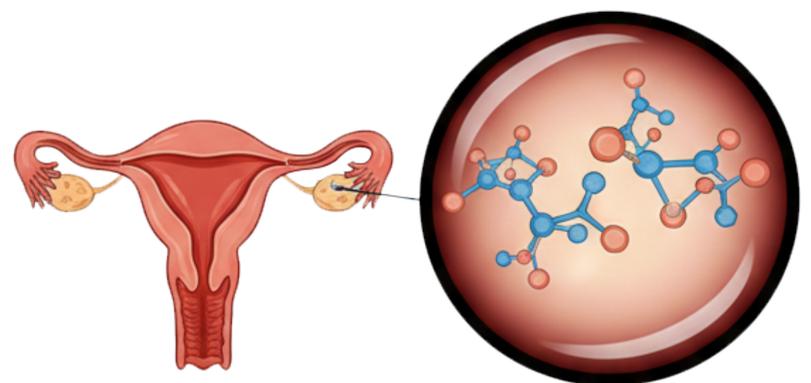
## 2. Estrogen Clarity Check

### Common symptoms survivors notice:

- Hot flashes or night sweats
- Difficulty staying asleep
- Mood swings or irritability
- Vaginal dryness or discomfort
- Low libido
- New joint stiffness or aches
- Worsening fatigue

### Useful questions to ask your care team:

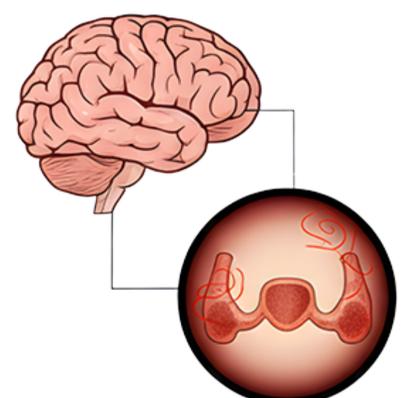
- "Are these symptoms typical of treatment-related menopause?"
- "What non-hormonal options exist to support these symptoms?"
- "How can we protect bone and heart health long-term?"



## 3. Testosterone Clarity (Prostate Cancer Survivors)

### Common symptoms survivors notice:

- Low energy or stamina
- Decreased muscle strength
- Low libido
- Mood changes (low mood, irritability)
- Difficulty maintaining weight or muscle
- Hot flashes
- Sleep disturbances



### Useful questions to ask your care team:

- “Are my symptoms consistent with treatment-related testosterone changes?”
- “What strategies can help with fatigue and muscle changes after therapy?”
- “Are there survivorship programs for men recovering from ADT?”

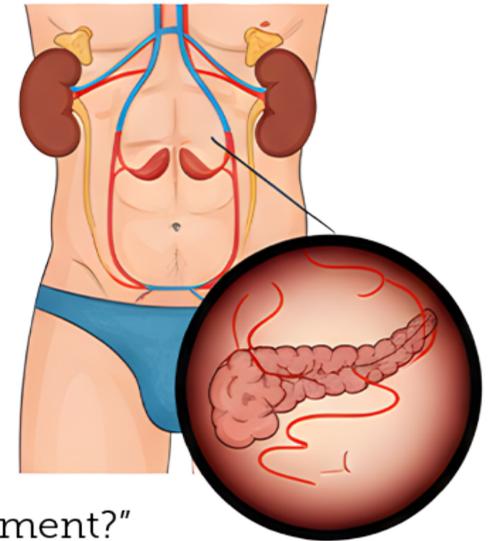
## 4. Cortisol & Stress Response Clarity

### Common symptoms survivors notice:

- Feeling ‘wired but tired’
- Energy crashes in the afternoon
- Difficulty waking up
- Trouble winding down at night
- Increased anxiety or irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed by small tasks

### Useful questions to ask your care team:

- “Could my stress-response system still be recovering from treatment?”
- “What lifestyle or supportive strategies might help with regulation?”



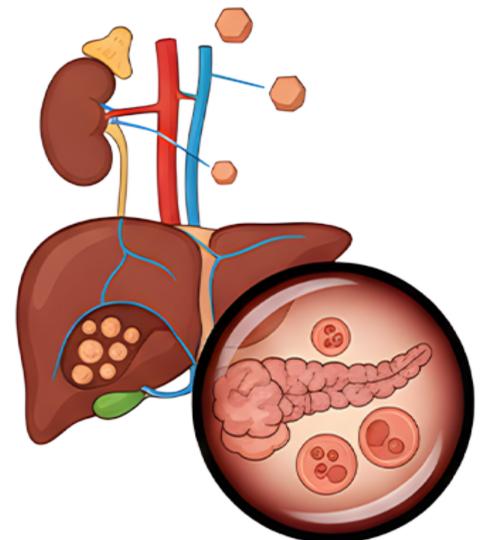
## 5. Blood Sugar & Metabolic Clarity

### Common symptoms survivors notice:

- Energy crashes after meals
- Feeling shaky, dizzy, or irritable when hungry
- Intense carb or sugar cravings
- Weight gain around the abdomen
- Brain fog
- Increased thirst or frequent urination

### Useful questions to ask your care team:

- “Could my fatigue be connected to blood sugar stability?”
- “Should we review my recent glucose or A1C results?”
- “What everyday habits could support metabolic health?”



# Sleep Reset Plan

Quality sleep is one of the most powerful—and most disrupted—drivers of fatigue recovery after cancer. Treatment, stress, hormonal changes, and circadian disruption all affect sleep. These strategies focus on restoring rhythm, reducing nighttime arousal, and improving sleep quality, not just sleep duration.

## 1. Reset Your Circadian Rhythm (Sleep–Wake Timing)

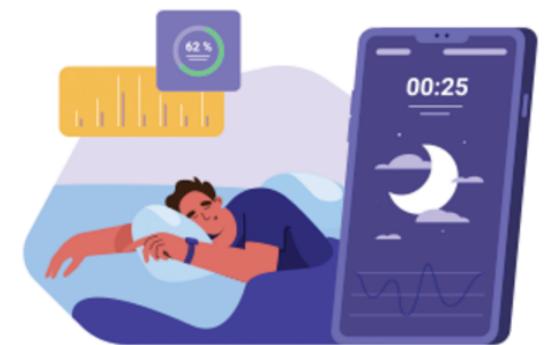
Cancer treatment often disrupts the body's internal clock, leading to light,

### What to do:

- Wake up at the same time every day, even after a poor night of sleep
- Get natural light exposure within 30 minutes of waking (outdoors if possible)
- Avoid sleeping in or “catch-up sleep” past 1 hour

### Why this helps:

Consistent wake times and morning light strengthen melatonin signaling at night, making it easier to fall and stay asleep.



## 2. Build a “Wind-Down Window” (60–90 Minutes)

Sleep does not happen on command—it requires a gradual shift into rest.

### What to do:

- Choose a non-negotiable wind-down start time
- Lower lights and reduce stimulation
- Do calming, repetitive activities (stretching, reading, breathing exercises)

### Avoid during this time:

- News, email, or problem-solving
- Bright overhead lighting
- High-intensity exercise

### Why this helps:

It lowers cortisol and signals safety to the nervous system—critical after cancer treatment.

## 3. Support the Nervous System Before Bed

Cancer and its treatments can keep the body in a state of heightened alert.

### What to do:

- Slow breathing (4–6 breaths per minute for 5 minutes)
- Gentle restorative yoga or legs-up-the-wall
- Body scan or guided relaxation

**Tip:** If your mind races, focus on physical sensations rather than thoughts.

### Why this helps:

Activating the parasympathetic nervous system improves sleep onset and depth.



### Checklist:

- Cool room temperature (65–68°F / 18–20°C if tolerated)
- Completely dark room (blackout curtains or eye mask)
- Quiet or consistent sound (white noise if helpful)
- Comfortable, supportive bedding

### Why this helps:

These cues reinforce the brain's association between bed and sleep.

## 5. Rethink Time in Bed

Spending too much time in bed can worsen insomnia and fatigue.

### What to do:

- Use the bed only for sleep and intimacy
- If you're awake for ~20 minutes, get up and do something calming
- Aim for sleep efficiency, not just hours in bed

### Why this helps:

It retrains the brain to associate the bed with sleep, not wakefulness or frustration.

## 6. Be Strategic With Naps

Naps can help—but only when used intentionally.

### Guidelines:

- Limit naps to 20–30 minutes
- Nap before 3:00 PM
- Skip naps if nighttime sleep is severely disrupted

### Why this helps:

Long or late naps reduce sleep drive at night, worsening insomnia.

## 7. Gentle Nutrition & Supplement Considerations

Some survivors benefit from targeted support—but this should always be individualized.

### General principles:

- Avoid caffeine after late morning
- Eat dinner at least 2–3 hours before bedtime
- Limit alcohol (even small amounts disrupt deep sleep)



### **Integrative options (discuss with your care team):**

- Magnesium glycinate or threonate
- Melatonin (low-dose, short-term use)
- Calming herbal blends, such as lemon balm and passionflower

### **Why this helps:**

Certain nutrients support neurotransmitters involved in sleep regulation, and herbs are calming to the brain, helping to induce relaxation.

## **8. When Sleep Doesn't Improve**

### **If sleep remains poor despite consistent habits:**

- Screen for pain, hot flashes, anxiety, or sleep apnea
- Consider cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I)
- Discuss medication or integrative options with a clinician

**Important:** Chronic poor sleep is not something you should push through.

### **Key Takeaway:**

Improving sleep after cancer is about **rebuilding rhythm, safety, and trust in the body again**. Small, consistent changes—done daily—are far more effective than chasing perfect sleep.

# Quick Energy Stabilizer Guide Foods that Fuel

Gentle food and hydration strategies to help steady your energy throughout the day.

## A Note Before You Begin

These ideas aren't about dieting, restriction, or perfection.

They're simple, low-effort energy stabilizers that help reduce dips, crashes, and "wired then wiped-out" cycles — something many survivors experience after treatment.

Choose one or two that feel doable today.

## 1. STEADY SNACK PAIRINGS

(Aim for one "pair" when you feel a dip coming on.)

These combos help keep blood sugar — and energy — more even:

### Protein + Produce/Fiber

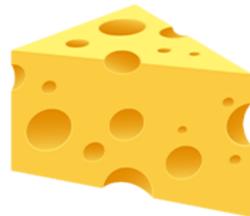


Handful of nuts

+



Fruits



Cheese

+



Sliced Apple



Nut Butter

+



celery or banana



Greek yogurt

+



berries



Small cottage  
cheese bowl



Peaches



Hummus



veggies or whole  
grain crackers



Hard-boiled egg



cherry tomatoes



Edamame and rice



Tuna with whole  
grain crackers



Warm Soup



Oatmeal with fruits

You only need a small portion – just enough to steady your energy.

## 2. MEAL TIMING FOR ENERGY STABILITY

(Gentle structure without rigidity)

### Don't Go Too Long Without Eating Guideline

Many survivors find that long gaps between meals lead to:



Brain Fog



Irritability



Sudden fatigue



Bigger crashes  
after eating

Try checking in with yourself every 2–3 hours:

“Do I need a small, stabilizing snack?”

## 3. HYDRATION SUPPORT FOR ENERGY

(Fatigue and dehydration look almost identical.)

### The “6 Sips Every Hour” Approach

Instead of chugging water, take a few slow sips throughout the day.  
Your body absorbs it more steadily.

### Flavored Hydration

If water is unappealing (very common after treatment):



Lemon



Cucumber



Diluted Juice



Herbal Tea

### Hydrating Foods Count Too



Soups



Oranges



Berries



Melons



Cucumber



Smoothies



# Fatigue Friendly Movement Menu

## A Note Before You Begin

Movement after cancer treatment is not about intensity, calories, or workouts – it's about reconnecting with your body, supporting circulation, and helping energy feel more stable.

Choose 2-4 from this menu based on your energy level today.

## 1. BARELY-THERE ENERGY MENU

(For crash days or "I can't do much" days)

### In-Bed or On-Couch Movements

- Ankle circles (10–20 seconds)
- Wrist circles
- Gentle side stretch
- Relaxed shoulder rolls
- Hand squeezes



### Breath-Linked Movement

- Inhale > slow arm float up
  - Exhale > arm float down
- (1–3 cycles)



### Comfort Moves

- Curling + uncurling fingers
- Soft neck side tilt
- Hugging a pillow and releasing

Goal: reduce tension, support circulation, and prevent stiffness.



## 2. LOW ENERGY MENU

(When you can do a little, but not much)

### Micro-Walks (30–90 seconds)

- Around the room
- Down the hallway
- To the mailbox
- Around your kitchen



### Seated Moves

- Seated march
- Seated side bends
- Seated spinal twist
- Seated toe taps





## Daily Life Movement

- Watering plants
- Folding 3–4 pieces of laundry
- Tidying one small area
- Standing while making tea

Goal: low-pressure movement that feels gentle and doable.



## 3. MODERATE ENERGY MENU

(Days when you have “a bit more” to give)

### Gentle Walk (3–10 minutes)

Pace should feel easy enough to hold a conversation.



### Light Stretch Sequence

- Neck
- Shoulders
- Chest
- Hips
- Back

Just 20–30 seconds each.



### Light Balance + Strength

- Sit to stand (1–3 reps)
- Heel raises
- Wall push-offs
- Gentle side stepping

Goal: support strength, confidence, and circulation.



## 4. HIGHER ENERGY MENU (Still Gentle)

(Days when you’re feeling brighter and want to build slowly)

### Longer Gentle Walk (10–20 minutes)

Break into intervals if needed (e.g., 5 minutes + rest + 5 minutes).



### Slow Flow or Stretch Class (Beginner-Level)

Online, in person, or self-guided.





## Light Strength Movements

- Light resistance band
- Bodyweight squats or wall sits
- Light weighted objects (cans, water bottles)



## Movement With Joy

- Dancing lightly to one favorite song
- Gentle mobility routine
- Tai chi or qigong-style movement

Goal: build strength and stamina in a survivor-appropriate way.



## 5. WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT YOU NEED

(A simple decision tree)

### Ask yourself:

**"Do I feel better after 20 seconds of gentle movement... or worse?"**

If better > choose something from the Low or Moderate Menu

If worse > stay in the Barely-There Menu and rest

This is a beautiful way to respect your body's cues.

## 6. PACING CHECK-IN

To avoid crashes, try the 30-30 Rule:

30 seconds to evaluate > 30 seconds of gentle movement

Stop if your body says "enough."

# Crash Recovery Guide

A gentle guide for the days when fatigue hits hard.

A note before you begin. Energy crashes after cancer are normal — they do not mean you're doing anything wrong. They're not setbacks. They're simply signals from your body asking for care, calm, and conservation. This plan gives you a simple path to follow when your energy suddenly drops.



## 1. Pause + Acknowledge the Crash

Before pushing through, take 10-20 seconds to check in:

- "My body is asking for recovery."
- "This crash will pass."
- "I can slow down without guilt."

A crash is not a failure — it's information.



## 2. Create a Low-Energy Zone

Make your immediate environment easier on your nervous system:

- Dim the lights
- Reduce noise (headphones, quiet room)
- Sit or lie down comfortably
- Remove any pressure to "get things done"
- Put your phone on low-stimulation mode (Do Not Disturb, or minimal notifications)

This helps your body shift out of overwhelm.



## 3. Gentle Reset Options

Choose one that feels doable — simple is best:

### Breathing Reset (1 minute)

Inhale 4 seconds → Exhale 6 seconds  
Repeat a few cycles.

### Warmth Reset

Wrap in a blanket or use a warm compress on your chest or abdomen.

### Stillness Reset

Close your eyes for 2–3 minutes and let your body be heavy.

### Micro-Movement Reset

If you feel up to it:

- Slow stretch of shoulders and neck
- Gentle walk to another room
- Sip of water

No pressure — choose what feels kind to your body.



## 4. Energy-Friendly Choices for the Next 1–2 Hours

When you're in a crash, these choices help reduce overwhelm:

- Sit instead of stand
- Break tasks into 1–2 minute pieces
- Use timers to pace yourself
- Eat something simple and steady if it's been a while
- Drink a small glass of water
- Delay non-urgent decisions
- Reduce multitasking

The goal is energy conservation, not productivity.



## 5. If You Need to Function

Sometimes life doesn't stop — so here are gentle supports:

- Choose the smallest version of the task
- Ask for help where possible
- Take micro-breaks (30–60 seconds)
- Lower your expectations for the rest of the day

You're managing fatigue, not powering through it.



## 6. End-of-Day Reflection (2 Minutes)

You can journal or simply think through this:

- What might have contributed to the crash?  
(stress, heavy meal, poor sleep, emotions, overactivity, heat, hormones)
- What helped?
- What can I adjust gently for tomorrow?

The goal isn't perfect tracking — it's compassionate awareness.



## 7. A Reassurance for Tomorrow

Crashes are part of the healing process.

They don't erase progress.

They don't define your recovery.

You can begin again tomorrow with a softer approach, more awareness, and the knowledge that your body is doing its best.

Today's crash felt like:

What helped most:

What I want to remember for next time:

## The Survivor Self-Compassion Cards



### *I'm Allowed to Move Slowly*

**Mantra:** "My pace is still progress."

**Prompt:** Where can I soften my expectations today?



### *Rest Is Not a Step Back*

**Mantra:** "Rest is repair, not retreat."

**Prompt:** What part of me most needs gentleness right now?



### *My Body Is Still Healing*

**Mantra:** Recovery continues long after treatment ends."

**Prompt:** What signs of healing can I see in myself?



### *Fatigue Is Information, Not Failure*

**Mantra:** "My body is communicating, not betraying me."

**Prompt:** What might my fatigue be trying to tell me today?



### *I Deserve Kindness From Myself First*

**Mantra:** "I can offer myself the softness I offer others"

**Prompt:** How can I be kinder to myself in this moment?



### *Small Things Count*

**Mantra:** "Tiny actions are still meaningful steps."

**Prompt:** What is one small win I can acknowledge today?



### *My Worth Is Not Measured by Productivity*

**Mantra:** "I matter because I exist, not because I 'do.'"

**Prompt:** Where can I release unnecessary pressure?



### *I Can Honor My Limits Without Guilt*

**Mantra:** "Saying 'no' protects my healing."

**Prompt:** What boundary could support my energy right now?



### *I'm Doing the Best I Can With the Energy I Have*

**Mantra:** "Effort looks different each day – and that's okay"

**Prompt:** What does "doing my best" look like today?



### *My Feelings Are Valid*

**Mantra:** "Everything I feel has a place."

**Prompt:** What emotion needs to be acknowledged gently?



### *My Body Deserves Patience*

**Mantra:** "Healing isn't linear, and that's normal"

**Prompt:** Where can I practice patience with my recovery?



### *I Am More Than My Fatigue*

**Mantra:** "There is a whole version of me beyond exhaustion"

**Prompt:** What part of myself feels strong, capable, or resilient?