

# Fatigue



## Advice and Information

### 1. What is Fatigue?

A feeling of tiredness or exhaustion, which affects you some, most or all of the time and is often not relieved by rest. People who have fatigue, have little or no energy and find it difficult to do everyday tasks.

Effects can be physical, psychological and emotional. You may find it difficult to concentrate, plan or remember things. Your level of fatigue may change from day-to-day or may last over several days. Fatigue can affect your emotions and you can feel frustrated, irritable, tearful and overwhelmed. It can feel as if no-one really understands.

### 2. What could be causing fatigue?

Fatigue is very common in patients with cancer or other chronic, serious conditions. It may be caused by the disease itself, be the result of other symptoms or be a side effect of medication. Fatigue caused by chemotherapy or radiotherapy usually improves after treatment stops but sometimes it can be long term.

### 3. Treatments that may help?

It is very important to discuss your fatigue with your GP/Consultant/Nurse Specialist/Therapist as some causes of tiredness can be treated and resolved e.g. anaemia, pain, breathlessness, loss of appetite, insomnia, fluid retention, infections, anxiety and depression.



### **Prioritise**

It is important to prioritise the tasks you wish to do each day or week. You could rank each task in order of priority to enable you to do the things most important to you when you have the most energy. Doing things just for you is important too. Family and friends are often keen to help so accept offers when they come.



### **Plan**

This will prevent you having to rush or do everything in one day which would deplete energy fast. Plan high energy tasks for when you are feeling your best, some people are brighter in the mornings, others are at their best in the afternoons - do what suits you. By planning the steps of a task you can simplify it by not doing unnecessary parts or delegating some stages of the task to others. By using an activity diary you can more easily balance activity and rest throughout the day and week.



### **Positioning**

Getting your body in the right position to do the task can help save energy. Try to arrange your work area so that everything is close to hand before you begin the task. Avoid stooping, twisting or stretching if possible. Ensure your body is comfortable during rest periods, you may wish to use extra pillows to support your head, arms and legs.



### **Pacing**

This means balancing activity so that the day is divided into periods of rest and activity (doing an activity and then allowing the body to recover). Not doing too much or too little. The aim is to maintain an even level of activity over that day and week.



### **Positivity**

Evidence suggests having a positive outlook helps reduce fatigue and other symptoms. It is important to be kind to yourself and recognise you are trying your best



## Self Care

- Sit rather than stand to wash/shower/brush teeth/apply makeup/shave - a perch stool or shower board may be helpful
- Put on a towelling robe after bathing/showering to save energy. Sit to rest before getting dressed
- Lay out clothes before starting to reduce walking back and forth. Use loose fitting clothes with few buttons. Use long handled shoe horn/sock aid if needed
- Try using an electric razor or electric toothbrush



## Walking

- Wear secure, non slip shoes
- Maintain good posture
- Place chairs at 'rest points' around the house, including at the top of the stairs or halfway landing if possible
- Use a walking aid or wheelchair for longer trips. Try hiring a scooter from shopmobility - plan trips during quieter times to reduce crowds
- You may be eligible for a disabled parking permit (blue badge)



## Housekeeping

- Use pre-packaged foods, frozen ready meals, allow plates to air dry, sit to prepare vegetables
- Transport items on a trolley, or wear an apron or jacket with pockets to carry things
- Cook twice as much and freeze half
- Plan menus for a week to avoid regular trips to the shops. Shop online.
- Use long handled gardening tools. Consider raised beds.



## Childcare

- Explain to your child(ren) that you are feeling tired and will have to take regular rest breaks
- Plan activities that can be done sitting down preferably around the table rather than the floor
- Try to avoid lifting - use the pushchair. Teach small children to climb onto your lap instead of being lifted
- Make tidy up time into a fun game



## Work

- Change your hours so that you can avoid busy rush hour traffic
- Ask your employer to find you a parking place near work
- Take regular short breaks, ensure everything is to hand at your work station
- Work from home if possible

## **Exercise**

There is good evidence that exercise helps to increase energy. Functional exercise which fits in with your normal lifestyle is preferable e.g walking, climbing stairs, housework, gardening. Short, frequent periods of activity will be most beneficial. You may wish to discuss this with a physiotherapist.

**The evidence shows that doing a bit more exercise will actually reduce fatigue, but this needs to be set against need for adequate rest.**

## **Rest**

Means both physical and mental rest and ideally should be in peaceful place, e.g bed/recliner armchair or outdoors. Even a short rest of 10 minutes will top up energy levels.

## **Stress busting**

- Prolonged or repeated episodes of fatigue can be stressful, and stress will add to fatigue.
- It will help if you can plan ahead, delegate, talk to trusted family, friends and professionals.
- Include 'me time' in your daily routine and use your usual stress busting strategies e.g walk the dog or have a cup of tea.

## **Relaxation**

Can take many forms. Choose the most effective for you such as music, visualisation, massage, warm bath, relaxation CD, and complementary therapies. Restorative activities can help revive energy levels too such as a walk in the forest or along a beach, sitting in the garden, bird watching, surrounding yourself with nature, reading, knitting, watching TV, listening to music.

## **How can I best support my relative/friend who has fatigue?**

- Understand the strategies that can help reduce fatigue and help them to make simple changes to pace and maximise their energy levels.
- Offer to help and support them to be independent with tasks that are most important to them.
- Caring for another person can be exhausting. It is important to look after yourself too.

