

Fatigue

Tiredness. Weariness. Exhaustion. Lethargy. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness and/or lack of energy. It is a symptom, rather than a specific disease or disorder. People who are fatigued feel tired in both body and mind and commonly have slowed reflexes and reduced function in daily life. Estimates vary, but it is thought that up to 60% of patients visiting their primary health care professional complain of fatigue. Fatigue is more common in women than men: women are affected almost twice as often as men.

Fatigue can be categorised as either:

- Simple fatigue: involves temporary decline in energy levels of duration < 6 months that is not severe enough to significantly impact on the patient's normal daily activities.
- Chronic fatigue: involves fatigue that is sufficiently intense and persistent to significantly affect normal daily activities for a period of 6 months or more.

Risk Factors

Major causative factors that can contribute to the incidence of fatigue include the following:

- Poor Nutrition
 - Nutritionally deficient diet
 - Anaemia (iron, folic acid and/or B12 deficiency)
 - B-complex deficiency caused by dietary inadequacies
 - Poor diet and/or nutrient malabsorption
- Metabolic
 - Fatigued adrenals (i.e., adrenal hypoactivity)
 - Addison's Disease
 - Subclinical or clinical hypothyroidism
 - Hypoglycaemia
 - Diabetes
 - Sleep disorders, such as INSOMNIA, sleep apnoea or restless leg syndrome
 - Chronic pain
 - Inflammatory bowel disorders – e.g. Celiac disease, Crohn's disease, IBS
 - Parkinson's disease
 - Cardiovascular disease
- Immunological Causes
 - Recent respiratory and/or gastrointestinal infection – particularly viral infections such as glandular fever (EBV) and cytomegalovirus (CMV)
 - Cancer
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Autoimmune disorders – e.g., SLE, Fibromyalgia
 - Bowel toxicity and/or dysbiosis
 - Food allergies

- Psychological Causes
 - Stress
 - Insomnia
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- Environmental Causes
 - Possibly environmental pollutants and contaminants
 - Toxic disorders such as lead or mercury poisoning
 - Pharmacologic causes (e.g., use of sleeping pills, antihypertensives or tranquilisers)
 - Liver toxicity
- Physiological Causes
 - Structural spinal misalignment
 - Poor postural habits
 - Post trauma
 - Sports injuries
 - Excessive/constant stress factors

Symptoms & Signs

Common signs and symptoms of fatigue include:

- Chronic tiredness or sleepiness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Sore or aching muscles
- Muscle weakness
- Slowed reflexes and responses
- Impaired decision making and judgement
- Moodiness, such as irritability
- Impaired hand to eye coordination
- Appetite loss
- Reduced immune system function
- Blurry vision
- Short term memory problems
- Poor concentration
- Hallucinations
- Low motivation

Diet and Lifestyle

A toxic burden on the body can contribute to fatigue. For this reason a comprehensive, integrated detoxification program is essential for correcting energy deficiencies.

Dietary guidelines that may assist in the management of fatigue include the following:

- Eat a healthy diet: increase the amount of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods, low fat dairy products and lean meats in your diet. Reduce the amount of high fat, high sugar and high salt foods.
- Avoid refined foods, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, saturated fats, dairy products, and gluten-containing grains.
- Increase fresh vegetables, legumes, whole grains (non-gluten), protein, and essential fatty acids (nuts, seeds, and cold-water fish).
- Weight reduction where appropriate is essential.
- Drink plenty of water - a dehydrated body functions less efficiently.
- Be careful with caffeine - one or two caffeinated drinks (like coffee or tea) per day boosts energy and mental alertness. However, heavy caffeine users (more than six drinks per day) are prone to anxiety, irritability and reduced performance. A lot of people are hypersensitive to caffeine and completely eliminating caffeine can reduce symptoms of fatigue markedly.
- Eat breakfast – the most important meal of the day! Food boosts your metabolism and gives the body energy to burn.
- Don't skip meals - going without food for too long allows blood sugar levels to dip. Try to eat regularly to maintain your energy levels throughout the day.
- Don't crash diet. The reduced food variety of the typical crash diet also deprives the body of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and trace elements.
- Don't overeat - large meals can drain your energy. Instead of eating three big meals per day, try eating six mini-meals to spread your kilojoule intake more evenly. This will result in more constant blood sugar and insulin levels.
- Eat iron rich foods - women, in particular, are prone to iron-deficiency (anaemia). Make sure your diet includes iron rich foods such as lean red meat.

Lifestyle guidelines may assist in the management of fatigue:

- Ensure adequate, regular, and consistent amounts of sleep each night.
- Effective relaxation is essential – try techniques such as yoga or meditation.
- Maintaining a reasonable work and personal schedule is important.
- Manage stressful circumstances.
- Address chronic pain and/or depression.
- Increase physical activity - physical activity boosts energy levels, while a sedentary lifestyle is a known cause of fatigue. Exercise 30-40 minutes at least 3 x per week, being sure that your heart rate is consistently elevated. Be sure to choose exercise you enjoy. E.g. brisk walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, squash, tramping, rowing, skiing etc
- Stretching – specific to structural issues as well as before and after exercise
- Avoid alcohol and drug use. Limit caffeine - too much caffeine, particularly in the evening, can cause insomnia.
- Limit caffeinated drinks to 2 or less per day, and avoid these types of drinks after dinner.
- Avoid sleeping pills - sleeping pills don't work in the long term because they don't address the causes of insomnia.
- Eliminate cigarette smoking. For the body to make energy it needs to combine glucose with oxygen, but the carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen available in the blood.
- Seek treatment for substance abuse - excessive alcohol consumption or recreational drug use contributes to fatigue, and is unhealthy and potentially dangerous.

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- Learning to do nothing is helpful. One of the drawbacks of modern life is the urge to drive ourselves to bigger and better heights. A hectic lifestyle is exhausting. Try to carve out a few more hours in your week to simply relax and hang out. If you can't find a few more hours, it may be time to rethink your priorities and commitments.
 - Have more fun! Laughter is one of the best energy boosters around.

If you, or anyone you know, are suffering from fatigue give us a call to discuss how we may be able to help you to find the answers you need to feel alive and have an abundance of energy!

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