

AgePage

Fatigue: More Than Being Tired

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness, or lack of energy. It can be a normal response to physical activity, emotional stress, boredom, or lack of sleep, but it can also signal a more serious mental or physical condition.

Everyone feels tired now and then. If you feel tired continuously for multiple weeks, you may want to see your doctor, who can help discover what's causing your fatigue and identify ways to relieve it.

Some Illnesses Cause Fatigue

Sometimes, fatigue can be the first sign that something is wrong in your body. For example, people with rheumatoid arthritis, a painful condition that affects the joints, often complain of fatigue. People with cancer may feel fatigued from the disease, treatments, or both.

Many medical problems and treatments can add to fatigue. These include:

- Certain medications, such as antidepressants, antihistamines and medicines for nausea and pain
- Medical treatments, like chemotherapy and radiation, or recovering from major surgery
- Infections
- Chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, thyroid disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Recent stroke
- Parkinson's disease

- Untreated pain and diseases like fibromyalgia
- Anemia
- Sleep apnea and other sleep disorders,

Managing a health problem may help reduce the fatigue. Your doctor can help.

Can Emotions Cause Fatigue?

Do you worry about your health and who will take care of you? Have you recently lost a loved one? Or have you lost your mobility and independence? Emotional stresses like these can take a toll on your energy. Fatigue can be linked to many conditions, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Grief from loss of family or friends
- Stress from financial or personal problems
- Feeling that you no longer have control over your life

What Is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) or ME/CFS, is a condition in which fatigue lasts six months or longer and is not related to other diseases or conditions.

People with CFS experience symptoms that make it hard to do daily tasks like dressing or bathing. Along with severe fatigue that doesn't get better with rest, CFS symptoms can include problems with sleep problems, difficulty with memory and concentration, pain, dizziness, sore throat, and tender lymph nodes. Learn more about CFS at www.cdc.gov/me-cfs.

Not getting enough sleep can also contribute to fatigue. Regular physical activity can improve your sleep. It may also help reduce feelings of depression and stress while improving your mood and overall well-being. Yoga, meditation, or stretching could also help you get more rest. Talk with your doctor if your mental well-being is affecting your sleep or making you tired.

Lifestyle Habits and Fatigue

Some lifestyle habits can make you feel tired. Here are some things that may be draining your energy:

- **Staying up too late.** A good night's sleep is important to feeling refreshed and energetic. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
- **Having too much caffeine.** Drinking caffeinated drinks like soda, tea, or coffee late in the day can keep you from getting a good night's sleep. Limit the amount of caffeine you have during the day and avoid it in the evening.
- **Drinking too much alcohol.** Alcohol changes the way you think and act. It may also interact with your medicines.
- **Getting too little or too much exercise.** Overdoing it without proper rest can cause stress and lead to fatigue. Regular exercise can boost your energy levels.

How Can I Feel Less Tired?

Some changes to your lifestyle can make you feel less tired. Here are some suggestions:

- **Keep a fatigue diary** to help you find patterns throughout the day when you feel more or less tired.
- **Exercise regularly.** Almost anyone, at any age, can do some type of physical activity. If you have concerns about starting an exercise program, ask your doctor if there are any activities you should avoid. Moderate exercise may improve your appetite, energy, and outlook. Some people find that exercises

combining balance and breathing (for example, tai chi or yoga) improve their energy.

- **Try to avoid long naps** (over 30 minutes) late in the day. Long naps can leave you feeling groggy and may make it harder to fall asleep at night.
- **Stop Smoking:** Smoking is linked to many diseases and disorders, such as cancer, heart disease, and breathing problems, all of which are associated with fatigue.
- **Ask for help if you feel swamped.** Some people have so much to do that just thinking about their schedules can make them feel tired. Working with others may help a job go faster and be more fun.

Can Boredom Cause Fatigue?

Being bored can make you feel tired. That may sound strange, but it's true. If you were very busy during your working years, you may feel lost about how to spend your time when you retire. When you wake up in the morning, you may see long days stretching before you with nothing planned. It doesn't have to be that way.

Engaging in social and productive activities that you enjoy, like volunteering in your community, may help maintain your well-being. Think about what interests you and what skills or knowledge you have to offer and look for places to volunteer.

When Should I See a Doctor for Fatigue?

If you've been tired or have been experiencing low energy for several weeks with no relief, call your health care provider. They will ask questions about your sleep, daily activities, appetite, and exercise, and likely provide a physical examination and order lab tests.

Your treatment will be based on your history and the results of your exam and lab tests. Your doctor may prescribe medications to target underlying health problems, such as anemia or thyroid problems. Health care providers also may suggest therapy or certain medications to help reduce depression, anxiety, or other emotional contributors that are associated with fatigue. They may suggest that you eat a well-balanced diet and begin an exercise program.

For More Information About Fatigue

National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237

cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov

www.cancer.gov

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

888-644-6226

info@nccih.nih.gov

www.nccih.nih.gov

MedlinePlus

National Library of Medicine

www.medlineplus.gov

For more information on health and aging, contact:

National Institute on Aging Information Center

800-222-2225

niaic@nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov

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