

Coping with fatigue and tiredness

Using your energy wisely



*because
you matter*

**St Nicholas
Hospice Care**

A Registered Charity No. 287773



Need to talk?

01284 766133

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What is fatigue and tiredness?

Fatigue means you feel exhausted or very tired all or most of the time. The feeling of tiredness does not improve by resting and can affect you physically and emotionally. Fatigue can be a vicious cycle of feeling like the more you do nothing, the more tired and fatigued you feel. This can impact on your life in many ways. Fatigue and tiredness is a common symptom for people living with long term or life threatening illness.

Some of the side effects of fatigue include:

- Feeling you have no energy or strength
- Difficulty doing small tasks such as brushing your teeth or making a cup of tea
- Reduced concentration and ability to make decisions
- Altered sleep pattern
- Losing interest in sex
- Feeling dizzy or light headed
- Low mood or change in emotions

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation is important and this leaflet gives advice on how not to waste energy. Think of your energy as a battery or bank account.



Some activities use up your battery life or bank funds, some activities help to top them back up. It is important not to let your energy levels get too low or empty, so you have enough to keep doing the things that are important to you.

Activity Cycling

Activity cycling is when you don't have the energy to do a task, so you stop completely, and when you do have the energy, you over do it. This then makes you feel more tired. It is easy to get into this cycle but using some of the following techniques could help.

The Five P's Rule

When trying to cope with fatigue, a simple rule is to remember The Five P's: **P**lan, **P**rioritise, **P**ace, **P**osition and **P**ermission.

Plan

Plan and organise your time. Plan your day ahead with periods of rest and periods of activity.

Prioritise

Do things for yourself where you can, but do not feel guilty if you have to ask someone else to help you with them. What is it important to spend your energy on today and what can wait?

Pace yourself

Have frequent rests, do things in your own time and don't feel hurried by others.

Positioning

Getting into a different position can save you energy. For example, sitting down to do your ironing or sort laundry, and sitting down to chop vegetables uses less energy than doing it standing up.

Permission

It is ok to do things differently, give yourself permission to do this. It might involve asking for help and taking rests when needed.



Even if you plan ahead you might not always have enough energy to do the things you want to do. Be kind to yourself, don't worry if you can't get through all your activities in a day.

Practical **help** with daily tasks

When suffering from fatigue and tiredness, it can be difficult to find the energy to do everyday tasks. Here are some tips and advice:

Personal care

- Try to sit down to get washed or dressed
- Use a towelled robe to help get dry after washing yourself
- Consider equipment such as a raised toilet seat or rails to help with getting on/off your toilet
- Use a long handle shoe horn to avoid bending to put shoes on, or a long handled sponge when washing
- Eat little and often to maintain energy levels



Around the home

- Sit down for as many chores as possible such as preparing food or doing the ironing
- Consider having a cleaner or gardener
- Ask family or friends to help with heavier household tasks
- Avoid unnecessary trips up and down the stairs - consider modifications to your home such as a stair lift
- Cook simple meals or use convenience foods, avoid bending down to the oven and use a microwave instead
- In the kitchen, store items so they are within easy reach, or move items down onto a worktop



An Occupational Therapist can give you advice on how to modify activity or provide equipment that may be helpful

Shopping

- Plan the day / time of your shopping trip to allow yourself enough energy to shop
- Write a list and plan your meals for the week in advance
- Use a trolley rather than a basket
- Ask for help at the checkout for packing your bags
- Visit the shops when it is quieter
- Try to park close to the shops
- Consider online shopping or asking family/friends to help



Childcare

- Explain your feelings of tiredness to children to help them understand
- Plan activities you can do with them sitting down such as drawing, board game, puzzles, computer games
- Avoid lifting children – encourage them to climb up onto your knee
- Involve the children in simple household chores
- Use family / friends / babysitters from time to time to give yourself a break



In the workplace

- Talk to your employer about your fatigue
- Discuss if you could change your hours or work more flexibly, spend some time working from home and in the office
- Discuss altered duties if your job is physically/mentally exerting
- Take short, regular breaks



For further advice, please speak to a member of the Independent Living Team

Exercise and Physical Activity

Exercise is important, even when you feel fatigued and tired. Research has shown that gentle exercise may help reduce symptoms of fatigue.

Basic tips for exercising when suffering from fatigue

- Take regular light exercise such as walking
- Plan exercise into your day
- Listen to your body after you have tried exercising - did you sleep better for example?
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Keep a record of your activities which will help show you how much you should be doing
- Remember functional activities such as housework are exercise
- Slowly increase your exercise tolerance if you can, for example have a 1 minute walk around your garden 4 x daily, then gently increase this time to a 2 minute walk around the garden and so on

Exercise as much as you feel able to, but don't overdo it



Sleep

Sometimes you can still feel fatigued even if you feel you've had a good sleep. This is a common feeling to experience. These are some useful tips to help promote quality sleep:

- It is good to get a sleep routine. Have regular bed times and getting up times. Set an alarm or your radio clock to wake you up in the morning
- Limit day time naps to 20 minutes, any longer will make you feel more tired
- Get some sunlight every day to help strengthen your body's natural rhythm
- Have a light snack or milky drink at bedtime to prevent hunger disturbing your sleep
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and cheese from early evening onwards
- A small night-cap might help, but too much will lead to fragmented sleep
- Regulate room temperature so it is not too hot or cold, experts advise the ideal temperature as 18-19 degrees centigrade
- Reduce noise and artificial light in your bedroom. Ear plugs can help. Turn your phone or tablet onto night mode to reduce the brightness
- Try to relax before you go to sleep, reading a book or listening to the radio can help. You could also try a relaxation recording – ask the Hospice about these or visit our website for recordings

If you have any questions or would like more advice about managing fatigue, please speak to your Hospice healthcare professional or call us on 01284 766133



Get in touch



If you would like to find out more about coping with fatigue please contact us.

01284 766133

enquiries@stnh.org.uk

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This leaflet is intended to be used as a guide alongside advice given to you by your GP, Hospice doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. If you have any doubts or queries please speak to one of our clinicians. Further advice and information is also available from the team at St Nicholas Hospice Care.

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This leaflet is available in different formats upon request.
Please contact the Marketing and Communications
Department for further information on 01284 766133.

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