Fatigue Management

For more information about fatigue related to medical illness, or the Center for Fatigue in Medical Illness (in NYC), visit the Fatigue Section on: [www.stoppain.org](http://www.stoppain.org) and take the Fatigue Survey.

Center for Fatigue in Medical Illness
Beth Israel Medical Center
Department of Pain Medicine and Palliative Care
First Avenue at 16th St., Baird Hall, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-844-1462
Fatigue is a common problem for people with medical illnesses. It may be due to the disease itself or medical and surgical treatments. Other illnesses and medications may also complicate this fatigue.

You may experience fatigue as a feeling of tiredness, more severe than the tiredness of healthy people. Weakness, exhaustion, a lack of energy, “don't feel like myself” may be words you use to describe your fatigue. It may appear suddenly, be overwhelming and not always be relieved by rest.

Fatigue can also impact on your ability to function well and start and finish tasks. You may have mental fatigue and have difficulty concentrating, a poor memory and make fatigue-related mistakes.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue.

- Keep a daily journal to learn about your pattern of fatigue, energy levels, and activities that cause you to feel more or less exhausted.
- Share this information with your health care professionals to identify the cause or aggravating situations and evaluate the best treatment approach for you.

Education
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Exercise may be beneficial in relieving your fatigue. Your exercise program should be tailored according to your age, gender, physical and medical condition.

Exercises should involve rhythmic and repetitive movement of large muscle groups (walking, cycling, or swimming). These exercises should begin gradually, several days a week, and not be performed to the point of exhaustion.

Some contraindications to low-intensity exercise include cardiac abnormalities, recurrent or unexplained pain, and onset of nausea with exercise.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue caused by lack of exercise.

- Take short walks or do light exercise
- Pace activities, build endurance slowly
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing
- Stretch before walking, warm up and start slowly
- Exercise at your pace
- Enjoy yourself
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It may be helpful to think about your fatigue and energy levels like a bank account. You only have so much energy available to spend. If you get low on your reserves, you need to make energy deposits.

There is no line of credit at the fatigue bank. When your energy bank account is low, there is no extra amount you can borrow. However, you can restore your energy in different ways. Distraction and socializing with friends and family can reinvigorate you.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue caused by lack of energy.

- Entertain yourself by listening to music, watching TV, playing cards
- Review your sleep patterns and practice sleep hygiene
- Plan your day so you have time to rest
- Take short naps or breaks rather than one, long rest period
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Energy conservation involves the use of planning, prioritizing, delegating, and pacing oneself to maintain important activities during times of fatigue.

Different activities in your daily life require different levels of energy. For example, basic tasks such as dressing, bathing and feeding may be done independently or require some assistance. Activities such as housework, child care, shopping, and meal preparation require more energy.

You may have used up all your energy to perform these two levels of daily tasks.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue caused by the use of your energy.

- Plan your day so you have time to rest
- Take short naps or breaks rather than one, long rest period
- Try easier or shorter versions of activities you enjoy
- Save your energy for the activities that are most important to you
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Anxiety, difficulty in coping with a medical illness, and sleep disturbances may contribute to fatigue. The use of distress reduction techniques such as relaxation therapy, hypnosis, guided imagery, or distraction may ease stress. A referral for counseling and/or training in stress management or cognitive therapies may be helpful for you. Fatigue can also impact your state of mind. You are not alone. Your mood, concentration, motivation and social relationships may be affected by fatigue. Symptoms often affect a person's quality of life.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue caused by stress.

- Join a support group
- Communicate your needs
- Ask for assistance
- Breathe deeply
- Learn about relaxation or meditation
- Schedule time in your day to relax and meditate
- Engage in spiritual and meaningful activities
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You may have experienced a change in your nutritional health because of your illness. This may be due to the illness itself or treatments. Some changes may include weight loss or gain, taste changes, no appetite, nausea, vomiting, digestive problems, constipation or diarrhea.

An assessment of your weight, hydration status, and electrolyte balance may be helpful to understand the status of your nutritional health and nutritional intake.

Referral to a dietician for meal planning and evaluation for nutritional supplements may be helpful.

The following actions may help to relieve fatigue caused by a change in your nutrition.

- Eat as well as you can with a variety of nutritious foods
- Drink plenty of fluids - 8 glasses of fluids per day
- Exercise as this may improve your appetite and help increase your energy
- Use the Food Guide Pyramid as a resource for basic nutrition information