

information

MANAGING FATIGUE

Fatigue is one of the most common problems for people with multiple sclerosis (MS). It is difficult for others to understand because it is not a highly visible symptom. Fatigue can often be treated very effectively once its cause is known.

ORDINARY FATIGUE is described as a sensation of muscular tiredness and weakness. It is the tired feeling that everyone has after working hard and is usually managed by a good night's rest.

FATIGUE ASSOCIATED WITH MS is described as an overwhelming sense of general weakness that can occur any time of the day without warning. There is an immediate need to rest. MS-related fatigue usually occurs more rapidly, lasts longer and takes more time to recover from than ordinary fatigue. It may occur for no apparent reason or after relatively mild exertion, such as a short period of walking, writing or reading.

VARIABLE EFFECTS OF FATIGUE: As with other symptoms of MS, the effects of fatigue vary from person to person. Fatigue may aggravate underlying MS symptoms such as stiffness and visual disturbances. At times it may be hard

to distinguish whether these symptoms are related to fatigue or to a relapse. Many people learn to recognise symptoms associated with episodes of fatigue as they tend to remain similar on each occasion. This is important in learning to manage fatigue because, at the first sign of change in sensory or motor function, the person with MS will know that their activity has been too energetic and that complete rest is overdue. It is essential to pause activity before fatigue and exhaustion set in.

Managing fatigue involves more than finding solutions to deal with it. Managing fatigue begins with acknowledging that it is part of having MS and then understanding how it affects you.

THINGS THAT MAY HELP YOU MANAGE FATIGUE:

- Keep physically fit within individual ability
- Avoid hot baths/showers
- Follow a healthy diet
- Plan work routines and social occasions, pace yourself
- Conserve energy, moderation is the key

ENERGY CONSERVATION CAN BE ACHIEVED BY OBSERVING FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES:

1. **BALANCE ACTIVITY WITH REST.** Learn to allow time to rest when planning a day's activities. ***Rest means doing nothing at all.*** Rest improves overall endurance and leaves strength for enjoyable activities.
2. **PLAN AHEAD.** Make a daily or weekly schedule of activities. Spread heavy and light tasks throughout the day.
3. **PACE ACTIVITY.** Rest ***before*** becoming exhausted. Take time out for five or ten minute rest periods during an activity, this can significantly increase overall endurance.
4. **LEARN "ACTIVITY TOLERANCE".** Break each activity down into a series of smaller tasks. Ask others to assist where possible.
5. **SET PRIORITIES.** Focus on those activities that must be done and learn to let go of any guilt associated with not finishing tasks as a result of fatigue.

EXPERIMENTATION: Managing fatigue effectively may mean doing a bit of experimentation at first to find a daily routine that suits the individual. For example, if fatigue is a greater problem in the afternoon, doing jobs that require concentration and effort in the morning may work best.

ORGANISATION: Managing fatigue by making the most of energy resources and applying energy conservation techniques also involves looking at how the home and work environment are organised. How and where items are stored, the height of working areas, entrances, types of furnishing and lighting, can all have a significant influence on the amount of energy required to complete an activity.

ADVICE: An occupational therapist can help to identify how to perform activities in the most energy-efficient manner. An occupational therapist can visit the home or workplace and offer advice on planning, work simplification and performing activities in the most efficient manner to help relieve fatigue.

KEEP IN TOUCH with health professionals at MS Australia. Advice from appropriate specialists will help you manage fatigue so that you can enjoy your life.

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