

Fatigue fighting tips

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness, or lack of energy that does not go away when you rest. People may feel fatigued in body or mind (physical or psychological fatigue).

Most of the time, fatigue can be traced to one or more of your habits or routines. Fatigue can be a normal and important response to physical exertion, poor eating habits, emotional stress, boredom, or lack of sleep.

In some cases, however, fatigue is a symptom of an underlying medical problem that requires medical treatment. When fatigue is not relieved by enough sleep, good nutrition, or a low-stress environment, it should be evaluated by your doctor.

Tips to help boost energy levels and fight fatigue

Chances are you know what's causing your fatigue. With a few simple lifestyle changes, it's likely that you have the power to put the vitality back in your life. Consider these different ways you can boost your energy levels.

Dietary suggestions for fighting fatigue

Have a good look at your diet – it's very important if you want more energy in your daily life. Suggestions include:

- **Drink plenty of water** – sometimes you feel tired simply because you're mildly dehydrated. A glass of water will help do the trick, especially after exercise.
- **Be careful with caffeine** – anyone feeling tired should cut out caffeine. The best way to do this is to gradually stop having all caffeine drinks (that includes coffee, tea and cola drinks) over a three-week period. Try to stay off caffeine completely for a month to see if you feel less tired without it.
- **Eat breakfast** – food boosts your metabolism and gives the body energy to burn. The brain relies on glucose for fuel, so choose carbohydrate-rich breakfast foods such as cereals or wholegrain bread.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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. You'll also find it easier to lose excess body fat if you eat this way.
- **Eat iron rich foods** – women, in particular, are prone to iron-deficiency (anaemia), which can lead to feeling fatigued. Make sure your diet includes iron-rich foods such as lean red meat.

Sleep suggestions for fighting fatigue

A common cause of fatigue is not enough sleep, or poor quality sleep. Suggestions include:

- **Get enough sleep** – two-thirds of us suffer from sleep problems, and many people don't get the sleep they need to stay alert through the day. Some recommendations on getting a good night's sleep include: go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time every day, avoid naps through the day, and have a warm bath or shower before bed.
- **Limit caffeine** – too much caffeine, particularly in the evening, can cause insomnia. Limit caffeinated drinks to five or less per day, and avoid these types of drinks after dinner.

- **Learn how to relax** – a common cause of insomnia is fretting about problems while lying in bed. Experiment with different relaxation techniques until you find one or two that work for you – for example, you could think of a restful scene, focus on your breathing, or silently repeat a calming mantra or phrase.
- **Avoid sleeping pills** – sleeping pills are not a long-term solution because they don't address the causes of insomnia.

Lifestyle suggestions for fighting fatigue

Suggestions include:

- **Don't smoke** – cigarette smoke contains many harmful substances. There are many reasons why smokers typically have lower energy levels than non-smokers – for example, 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.
- **Increase physical activity** – physical activity boosts energy levels, while a sedentary lifestyle is a known cause of fatigue. Physical activity has many good effects on the body and mind. A good bout of exercise also helps you sleep better at night. Seek advice and encouragement regarding the steps you can take toward a more active lifestyle and talk to your doctor if you haven't exercised in a long time, are obese, are aged over 40 years or have a chronic medical condition.
- **Move more, sit less** – reduce sedentary behaviours such as watching television and using computers, and break up long bouts of sitting.
- **Seek treatment for substance abuse** – excessive alcohol consumption or recreational drug use contribute to fatigue, and are unhealthy and potentially dangerous.
- **Workplace issues** – demanding jobs, conflicts at work and burnout are common causes of fatigue. Take steps to address your work problems. A good place to start is to talk with your human resources officer.

Psychological issues and fatigue

Studies suggest that between 50 and 80 per cent of fatigue cases are mainly due to psychological factors. Suggestions include:

- **Talk about it** – There's some evidence that talking therapies such as counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy might help to fight fatigue. See your doctor for a referral for 'talking' treatment.
- **Reduce stress** – Stress uses up a lot of energy. Try to introduce relaxing activities into your day. This could be working out at the gym, or a gentler option such as meditation, yoga, listening to music, reading or spending time with friends. Whatever relaxes you will improve your energy.
- **Assess your lifestyle** – for example, are you putting yourself under unnecessary stress? Are there ongoing problems in your life that may be causing prolonged anxiety or depression? It may help to seek professional counselling to work out family, career or personal issues.
- **Learn to do nothing** – one of the drawbacks of modern life is the pressure 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** – maybe you're so preoccupied with commitments and pressures that you don't give yourself enough time for fun. Laughter is one of the best energy boosters around.

Coping with the mid-afternoon energy slump

Most people feel drowsy after lunch. This mid-afternoon drop in energy levels is linked to the brain's circadian rhythm and is 'hard wired' into the human body. Prevention may be impossible, but there are ways to reduce the severity of the slump, including:

- Incorporate as many of the above fatigue-fighting suggestions as you can into your lifestyle. A fit, healthy and well-rested body is less prone to severe drowsiness in the afternoon.
- Eat a combination of protein and carbohydrates for lunch, for example a tuna sandwich. Carbohydrates provide glucose for energy. Protein helps keep your mind attentive and alert.

- Get moving. A brisk walk or even 10 minutes of stretching at your desk improves blood flow and boosts energy.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Always see your doctor to make sure that your fatigue isn't caused by an underlying medical problem.
- Activity and nutrition are an important part of putting more energy into your daily life.
- Studies suggest that between 50 and 80 per cent of fatigue cases are mainly due to psychological factors.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Bluearth Foundation

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2015 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.