



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

WHY AM I SO TIRED?

WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE AND HOW TO FIGHT IT

We have all seen toddlers cry or melt down for no apparent reason. It is usually a reaction to being tired. The same thing can happen to adults, except that instead of crying, we simply absorb the effects of fatigue, allowing it to severely affect our quality of life. Adequate sleep prepares people for learning by enhancing alertness, attentiveness, and motivation, and by decreasing irritability, distractibility and moodiness. Chronic fatigue can therefore affect someone's ability to perform certain tasks, either at home or at work, affecting their career or family life. At its worst, failure to remain alert can lead to an accident or injury. Chronic fatigue can have many other physical and mental effects on health and wellbeing. Prevention is the best way to avoid it, and there is more to it than simply getting a good night's sleep.

HOW TO CONSERVE ENERGY TO FIGHT FATIGUE

- Organize cupboards, storage areas and work areas so that frequently-used supplies, food items or equipment are always within easy reach.
- Keep heavy items on a work surface to avoid having to move them when it's time to use them.
- Duplicate heavy items: keep a vacuum cleaner both upstairs and downstairs in your house.
- If you're working in the garden, use a gardening bench or a padded kneeler to reduce joint stress and conserve energy.
- Delegate: ask or hire other people to carry out certain tasks that you find tiring.
- Have groceries and other goods delivered to the home.



WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE?

Lack of sleep is the obvious answer to this question, and the simplest one, but there are other reasons you might be feeling tired. Fatigue could be caused by an illness or disease, including something that has not yet been diagnosed. Fatigue can be a symptom of a general infection, respiratory problem, heart condition, myalgic encephalopathy (ME), chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS), or a progressive neurological condition that affects muscle control. Tiredness is one of the earliest and most common symptoms of multiple sclerosis as well as other auto-immune diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis and lupus (systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)). The fatigue itself, a symptom of the illness, can in turn exacerbate the illness, and make it difficult to cope physically, mentally and emotionally.

Fatigue can also be side effect of some medications, including antihistamines, antidepressants and some blood pressure medications. The benefits of medication should therefore be balanced against the degree to which they cause fatigue. Increased heat and humidity or a lack of proper ventilation can also make you tired – a cool household is healthier; open a window. Pain is another factor. Arthritis, for example, is not only painful but can make you tired. Stress and anxiety, which take a toll on the body both physically and mentally, can also cause fatigue and feelings of lethargy.

FIGHT FATIGUE BY CONSERVING ENERGY

In order to find a solution, try to identify the problem. Which activities, circumstances or illnesses might be causing excessive fatigue in your life? Are there particular situations related to excessive fatigue? When do problems start? Is there pain involved?

One way to deal with fatigue is to reduce the amount of energy you use while engaging in certain physical activities. Many tasks can be carried out in different, more ergonomic ways. Cupboards, storage areas and work areas could be reorganized so that frequently-used supplies, food items or equipment are always within easy reach. Heavy items should be kept on a work surface to avoid the need to move them. It also helps to duplicate heavy items to avoid having to carry them from one place to another – keep a vacuum cleaner both upstairs and downstairs in your house, for example.

If you're working in the garden, use a gardening bench or a padded kneeler – doing tasks when seated helps reduce strain on joints and avoids energy expenditure. By making even slight adjustments to the way tasks are carried out, physical strength can be conserved. Excessive bending, reaching, carrying and lifting should be avoided. Using long-handled items can reduce the amount of bending and stretching. When lifting a load, it should be held close to the body and the back kept straight by using the abdominal and buttock muscles. Many loads can be divided into smaller amounts and a backpack or shoulder bag should be used or items carried in each hand.

Some tasks may be unnecessary altogether, or put off until another day, thereby pacing yourself and conserving energy. It can be difficult to come to terms with the fact that not every task will be completed, but unfinished tasks can generally be left until the next day. You could also delegate, by asking or hiring other people to carry out certain tasks, particularly those that are tiring. Also, many services such as banking and shopping can be done by phone or using the internet. Groceries and most other goods can be delivered to the home. Save your energy for what is most important to you, including whatever makes you happy and stress free.