



Your guide to...

Managing Fatigue

How to cope with symptoms



How to use this guide:

This guide forms part of a series. Each guide provides information, tips and strategies for coping with physical health symptoms that are impacting on daily life. Physical health symptoms can be personally challenging on both a practical and emotional level; with this in mind, these guides have been edited and co-developed by specialists from both physical and mental healthcare teams, with guidance from experts with lived experiences.

All information in these guides are intended to advise and benefit the individuals who intend to use them. The information described can be used as a supplement but does not replace any advice provided by your healthcare specialist(s). The authors do not accept responsibility for use of the information contained in the guides for any other purpose than has been described. If you are concerned about your physical health symptoms or condition(s) then you should seek qualified medical advice from your GP or your healthcare specialist(s).

Contents

How to cope with symptoms of fatigue	2
1. Daily Routine	2
2. Fatigue Diary	2
3. Rest.....	2
4. Planning and Organisation	3
5. Prioritise	3
6. Setting realistic goals	3
7. Asking others for help and support.....	4
8. Graded Activity.....	4
9. Sleep.....	5
10. Look after yourself	6
Other fatigue management methods that you might find helpful	7

How to cope with symptoms of fatigue

It is important to try to manage and monitor any fatigue symptoms. This is the case if you are adapting to life with a longstanding health problem that results in the extreme tiredness that is characteristic of fatigue or if you are learning to adapt to a new diagnosis (such as long-COVID). This also applies to situations where you might be trying to manage multiple symptoms alongside fatigue such as breathlessness, chronic pain, concentration and memory problems, stomach problems or other bodily sensations.

1. Daily Routine

Try to establish a daily routine, for example sleeping, eating, activities of daily living (e.g. washing, dressing). It may help to use an activity diary to help you to do this. If previous routines are not possible, it is important to establish a new, realistic one and follow it. A regular routine helps establish a structure and rhythm to the day and will help you keep on course with managing fatigue.

2. Fatigue Diary

Consider keeping a fatigue diary. This will be able to help you see any patterns in your fatigue levels, which you can then adjust accordingly. For example, times of day that you might have more energy, certain activities that make you particularly tired.

3. Rest

If you are experiencing high levels of fatigue, it is important to have rest breaks throughout the day. Resting can prevent you from getting to the point of complete exhaustion.

Planned rest can give you more control over when you choose to be active and when you take a break. It may be helpful to use breathing strategies, or guided relaxation strategies to help provide a sense of calm.



*For more information please read: **Guide C1 'Your guide to relaxation and breathing techniques: supporting wellbeing and health management'***

4. Planning and Organisation






It might be that with clear planning and organisation, you could lessen your fatigue ‘load’. For example, if you have an appointment that requires a fair amount of travel, have a shower and wash your hair the night before, organise the clothes you want to wear before, plan the optimal route which will allow you to stop for a rest break. Try to plan your day to balance between easier and more difficult tasks, making time to rest in between.

5. Prioritise

If you are suffering with fatigue, consider whether you can re-prioritise your usual activities, or even stop them for a while? Making changes to your routine can be difficult, but prioritising activities means you can save energy for the things you really want or need to do. Perhaps order the activities that make up your usual routine, and evaluate which ones are most important, and which ones can be put on the ‘back burner’ until fatigue levels are more manageable.

6. Setting realistic goals

Setting goals will help you to make choices about where to spend limited energy resources. These should be reflective of what is most important to you and should be achievable within the limits of high levels of fatigue. To help with this, goals should be SMART:

Specific		What is the goal? What do you want to do?
Measurable		How will you know you have achieved it?
Achievable		Is the goal attainable and within your reach? What skills, resources or support do you need to achieve it?
Realistic or Relevant		Is the goal realistic? Does it matter to you?
Time-specific		When do you want to have completed your goal by? Set a time-limit for reviewing your goal so you can see how things are going and adjust accordingly.

7. Asking others for help and support

To what extent can you delegate a task? Your energy is a limited resource. Save it for what you are able to do, and don't struggle with tasks that you find more difficult. Ask if a family member or friend can help you out. Alternatively, can you arrange for a company or service to help out? For example, getting help with ordering shopping online or contacting the NHS volunteer service and asking for help with shopping.

When asking for help, remember that to do so is a sign of strength. Asking for help is a way of organization yourself and shows a desire to want to get on with things. It is not a sign of weakness.

“When you judge yourself for needing help, you judge those you are helping. When you attach value to giving help, you attach value to needing help. The danger of tying your self-worth to being a helper is feeling shame when you have to ask for help. Offering help is courageous and compassionate, but so is asking for help.”

Brené Brown (2015)

Source: Rising Strong by Brené Brown (2015) First ed. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

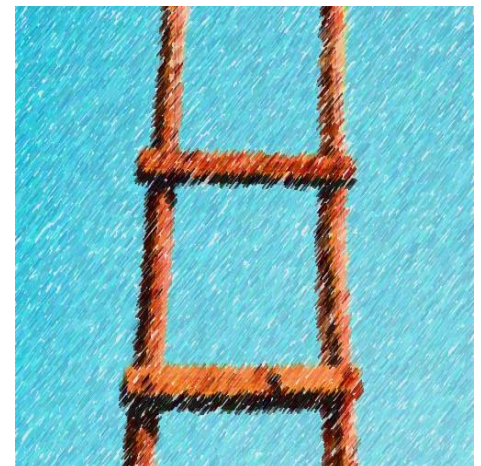
8. Graded Activity

Choose a goal you might have; for example, getting more fresh air during the day, with the ultimate aim of visiting your local park.

If you imagine this goal as a ladder with a number of rungs - the first rung might be sitting outside for an hour or so in the garden.

The second rung might be walking to the end of the street, resting and making your way back.

The third might be walking to the local shops with a couple of rest breaks.



The fourth might be going to the local park and sitting on a bench.

The fifth might be going to the park and taking a short stroll around it.

All the while progress would need to be carefully monitored so that there are no setbacks with fatigue management.



*For more information about how to apply 1-8, please read: **Guide C2 'Your guide to pacing: supporting wellbeing and health management'***

9. Sleep

A good sleep routine is essential for managing high levels of fatigue. Taking steps to promote a good sleep routine is sometimes called 'sleep hygiene'. Some suggestions are below for encouraging good sleep hygiene:

Food and Drink: Do not drink caffeine (coffee, tea, coke) after 4 p.m. Avoid alcohol as it will interfere with your sleep. Do not eat a big meal late in the evening, but equally, do not go to bed hungry.

Have a regular bedtime routine: Establishing a regular routine helps to let your body know when it is time to go to sleep. Have a soothing drink in the evening, for example, camomile tea. Consider having a relaxing bath.

Go to bed at the same time each night as frequently as possible. Consider reading a book or listening to relaxing music before bed. When in bed, try to think of calming thoughts (such as imagining a peaceful beach or garden, or thinking of something enjoyable you have done, like seeing a friend, going for a walk, listening to a nice piece of music). Try to get up in the morning at around the same time each day.

If you are finding it difficult to get to sleep at night, consider reducing any daytime naps that you might have.

Make your bedroom a pleasant place: Keep it clean and tidy, have a soft nightlight by your bed, do not have any 'screens' in your room (e.g. mobile phone, tablets, laptops, television). Try to

make sure that your bed and bedroom is for sleeping only – this helps your brain to make a stronger connection between your bedroom environment and sleepiness.

10. Look after yourself

Try to have a balanced diet and avoid very large meals or caffeinated or sugary drinks or snacks.

Keep hydrated.

Plan pleasurable activities into your week, whilst also taking your fatigue levels into account.



Other fatigue management methods that you might find helpful

There are several websites that describe techniques about how to cope with fatigue if you have this as either (i) a standalone symptom, (ii) as part of a health condition or (iii) combined with other symptoms such as breathlessness. You can access these using the links below:

Royal College of Occupational Therapists Guides: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/recovering-covid-19-post-viral-fatigue-and-conserving-energy>

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care Guides:
<https://www.acprc.org.uk/publications/patient-information-leaflets/> (GL-03 Energy Conservation)

British Lung Foundation Leaflets: <https://shop.blf.org.uk/collections/lung-health-information>
(including their [long-COVID pages](#))

British Heart Foundation: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/living-with-fatigue> (including their [long COVID pages](#))

Your COVID recovery NHS website: <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/managing-the-effects/effects-on-your-body/fatigue/>

The ME Association website: <https://meassociation.org.uk/product-category/covid-19/> (including their [long-COVID updates](#))

Action for ME Trust: <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/get-information/managing-your-symptoms/introduction/>

Macmillan's coping with fatigue booklet for people with fatigue as a result of cancer or cancer treatments: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/stories-and-media/booklets/coping-with-fatigue-tiredness>

The Brain Charity Website: <https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk/how-we-can-help/practical-help/information-advice/living-with-a-condition/managing-fatigue>

Top tips for managing fatigue:

- **Be sure to stop and rest - consider sitting to do tasks**
- **Build rest into your daily routines - don't wait until you are fatigued before resting**
- **Get into positions that will help with energy conservation. E.g. relax the shoulders, keep elbows low and close to the body**
- **Learn how to relax and practice this regularly as part of your daily routine**
- **Plan ahead, stay organised and pace yourself so you don't take on too much or get bored**
- **Ask for help with tasks where possible**
- **Break tasks into smaller steps with time for rest**
- **Adopt good sleep hygiene. Wind down before bedtime. Imagine yourself somewhere you find relaxing. Think about the scenery and the colours, smells and sounds.**
- **Try to adopt healthy habits - drink and eat well**