

# Fourteen Ways to Fight Fatigue

H. Rand Scott, M.D.

Chronic pain and fatigue often go hand in hand. Pain makes fatigue worse and fatigue causes pain to be worse. This all adds up to feelings of loss of control, loss of concentration, irritability, and of course loss of energy. So how does the chronic pain sufferer fight fatigue?

## 1. Search for the Cause

- Sure pain such as fibromyalgia or lower back pain can cause fatigue, but there may be other factors contributing as well. Medical causes such as anemia, heart or lung problems should be ruled out. It is common to blame the thyroid gland, but in reality, it is a rare cause of fatigue. More common are emotional causes such as depression, or stress. Poor diet, and lack of exercise are common contributors as well. Environmental factors such as poor ergonomic workplace set-up, constant noise, and warm temperatures can contribute.

## 2. Learn to Pace Yourself

- When you have pain, it is almost always better to pace yourself to avoid making your pain and fatigue worse.
- Do a heavy task, then a light task, then another heavy task, and so on. Do the most difficult things when you're feeling your best. If you pace yourself, you probably can work more than if you work straight through until you're worn out.
- Learn your body's signs of getting tired. Take breaks during or between tasks, before you get too tired.
- Don't try to do too much at one time.
- Break down long-term goals into small, manageable steps that can be finished in a short time.

## 3. Strive for Good Posture

- Change the way you do activities so that you don't put too much stress on your joints. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.
- Maintain good posture. Poor posture (slouching) can stress your muscles and lead to fatigue.

## 4. Eat a Balanced Diet

- Start off eating a good breakfast.
- Whatever you eat, do so in moderation.

## **5. Avoid Quick Fixes**

- Herbs, over the counter sleep aides, caffeine, "natural" thyroid supplements and the like are enticing quick fixes, but can have disastrous effects when used improperly in a chronic pain sufferer. Your Pain Specialist can help you through this maze of products.

## **6. Get Organized**

- Chronic fatigue can come from a sense of being overwhelmed.
- Plan ahead. Look at all the tasks you do both at home and at work during a normal day and week. Eliminate the ones that are not necessary. Delegate some of the others. Make a schedule for each day, the night before or in the morning. Think about what each task involves in terms of the amount of time it requires and how tiring it is. Make an action plan with this in mind. Schedule rest breaks before you begin.
- Combine chores and errands so you can get more done with less effort. Create shortcuts. For example, you can save time and energy by preparing several meals in advance. If you want to serve more complex meals, choose a day when you have more time and are feeling well.
- Use laborsaving devices, such as an electric garage door opener, a microwave oven, or a food processor.
- Use self-help devices, such as tools with enlarged handles, jar openers, or "reachers" - long-handled devices that help you reach high places. These reduce stress on your joints and can make difficult tasks easier.
- Organize work areas so you can get more done with less energy. Arrange your desk or workspace using inexpensive storage bins. Remove unnecessary items from your briefcase to lighten the load between home and work. Keep equipment needed for a particular task together in one area. As a general rule, keep items you use most often nearest to your work area and less-used items further away. If you are writing a report, assemble all the information needed before you begin. If you are baking, store mixing bowls, sifter, measuring cups, and spoons in one place. If you are doing housework, keep cleaning supplies in several places: kitchen and bathroom, upstairs and downstairs.

## **7. Get Enough Sleep**

- Getting a good night's sleep restores your energy and helps you cope with pain. It is important to get the right type of sleep- known as Rapid Eye Movement or REM sleep. Many sleep aides let you close your eyes, but don't promote restorative sleep.
- The goal for most adults is 8 hours sleep a night, but this number decreases as you get older.

## **8. Make Focused Exercise a Daily Routine**

- Exercise promotes the release of pain killing substances in the body known as endorphins. These reduce pain and promote a sense of well being. Exercise is also good for nearly every organ system in the body. It is one of the best cures for constipation. Exercise should be combined with a stretching program.
- Initially, exercise may make you more tired. You will sleep better however. Remember not to exercise too late at night, or it may keep you up at night.

## **9. Maintain the Proper Weight**

- Being too thin or too fat can contribute to your fatigue. Ask your doctor to calculate your ideal body weight, and strive to maintain that weight.

## **9. Follow Your Treatment Plan**

- See your doctor regularly. Make sure you follow the treatment plan you and your health care provider have designed. Don't skip medications on days you feel good. This can backfire and lead to increased symptoms. Report any changes in general health to your health care provider so appropriate measures can be taken.

## **10. Learn Relaxation Techniques**

- There are simple relaxation techniques you can learn to help reduce stress at home and at work. Formal biofeedback training is the ultimate in relaxation techniques and can be your best friend without resorting to medications.

## **11. Ask for Help**

- Ask for help when you need it! Family, friends, and co-workers would rather help you than have you overextend yourself, trigger a flare, and be confined to bed. There are support groups run by trained behavioral professionals that can be very informative.
- Some people are afraid to admit they need help. They believe others will think they are crazy if they talk to someone about their problems. It's smart to get help when you're forced to live with a difficult problem such as chronic pain and fatigue. If you are having symptoms of depression - poor sleep, change in appetite, crying, sad thoughts - be sure to talk with your health care provider.

## **12. Focus on Fun**

- Enjoying a fun and relaxing activity can decrease stress and help take your mind off your fatigue. Get involved in hobbies or activities you enjoy. Read a good book. If you don't work or are retired, participate in volunteer activities, charities, church, or schools. These will lift your spirits, give you something to look forward to, and help you feel good about helping others.

## **13. Don't get Discouraged**

- Fatigue can affect all parts of your life, but there are many things you can do to cope with it. If the first methods you try do not work, try other methods. Prepare for the ups and downs. Remember - the most effective way to manage fatigue is to attack the problem by using all of the techniques described above.

## **14. Call the Experts at Newport Pain Management.**

- Dr. Scott can help with your pain and related fatigue problem.
- 949 759-8400 for an appointment.
- [www.newportpain](http://www.newportpain.com) for more information about us.