

Intro:

Mary F. Schmidt, PhD, ABPP is a board certified clinical neuropsychologist who has been working with people who have survived stroke for over 20 years, mostly in rehabilitation settings. She is interested in helping people do as well as they can. Participation in community forums like this is one way for people with stroke to learn more, and to move from surviving to thriving.

Much of today's discussion will focus on information from these two resources.

http://www.strokeassociation.org/idc/groups/stroke-public/@wcm/@hcm/documents/downloadable/ucm_309719.pdf

<http://www.stroke.org/we-can-help/survivors/stroke-recovery/post-stroke-conditions/physical/fatigue>

Fatigue after Stroke:

Feeling tired after stroke affects between 40 and 70 percent of stroke survivors. Often, one feels drained of energy. Even with frequent rest breaks, one can feel tired after a little exertion. This lack of energy can limit your ability and initiative to participate in rehabilitation therapies. The fatigue makes it hard to get started and keep moving.

Post-stroke fatigue is often confused with "being tired." It is not necessarily the same as tiredness, because it arrives without warning and rest does not always make it better. It occurs differently in every individual. It may feel like you are hitting the wall, physically, emotionally, and/or mentally.

Why am I so tired? It's important to pinpoint what's causing you to be tired. Then you can take action to manage it. Consult with your healthcare provider to rule out any medical conditions that might cause tiredness or make it worse

Energy is a limited resource. Each person starts each day with a set amount of energy. Energy drains quickly and is not easily refilled. Energy may change for some important reasons.

- You may have less energy than before because of sleeping poorly, not getting enough exercise, poor nutrition or the side effects of some of the medicine.
- You have as much energy as before, but you're using it differently. Because of the effects of your stroke, things, like dressing, talking or walking, take a lot more effort. Changes in thinking and memory take more concentration. You have to stay "on alert" all the time — and this takes energy.

- You also may feel tired due to emotional changes. Coping with frustration, anxiety, anger and sadness can be draining. Depressed feelings are common after a stroke. Often, loss of energy, interest or enthusiasm occurs along with a depressed mood.

Many factors can influence your level of energy and fatigue after a stroke. Let's talk about most likely causes, all of which may interact with each other, including:

- Sleep.
 - Quality of sleep may become poor due to irregular sleep cycles, sleep that is disrupted due to pain, discomfort, inability to easily find a comfortable spot. Sleep may not be refreshing.
- Medications.
 - Some medications may make you more tired than usual
- Post-stroke effects.
 - Everything after a stroke takes more energy. Physical post-stroke symptoms such as upper limb weakness or paralysis require more energy for movement and activities of daily living. Paying attention, thinking or expressing yourself requires more effort, and thus, drains energy faster.
- Pain.
 - Pain depletes energy quickly due to movement limitations, inability shift attention and emotional factors.
- Depression.
 - Being tired and having trouble concentrating are common effects of depression. . Clinical depression is a treatable illness that happens to many stroke survivors. Symptoms include significant lack of energy, lack of motivation, and problems concentrating or finding enjoyment in anything. Talk to your doctor about an evaluation for clinical depression if tiredness continues. There is nothing to be ashamed of if you are feeling depressed. It is very common, and the good news is that it is treatable!
- Anxiety
 - Anxiety and worry pull lots of energy. Anxiety/worry creates the same sort of energy loss that occurs when you turn up the thermostat to warm the house but have windows open at the same time.....energy out the window without meeting your goal.

If you talk to your physician or clinician to say: I am tired and need help, you will be told: There is no specific treatment or medication to treat post-stroke fatigue. However, there are treatments for some of the factors mentioned above.

Talk to your healthcare professional to get an accurate diagnosis for the cause of your fatigue.

- If fatigue is a side effect of medications you are taking perhaps doses, time of day, or an alternative medication might help.
- If depression seems to be the root cause of your fatigue it can be treated in a number of ways.

Progress

Most stroke survivors start feeling less tired over time. Here are some ideas to incorporate into your daily life that can help as you move forward with recovery:

- Communicate. Your fatigue may not be obvious to others so talk to your friends, family and employer about what you are experiencing.
- Rest. Give yourself plenty of time to rest, including naps or scheduled rest periods during the day.
- Moderation. Don't push yourself too hard, especially not if you are having a good day, it will leave you exhausted the next day.
- Take your time. Give yourself plenty of time. It may take you longer to get ready to go places. Rushing is exhausting.
- Start small. Build up stamina and strength slowly. Maintain some level of regular exercise and gradually increase it.
- Watch what you eat. Eat a healthy diet. Include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Consult your healthcare professional if you have questions about what diet is best for you.
- Listen to your body. You are the expert on how you feel.
- Journal. Keep a diary of how much you are doing every day. Celebrate your successes as you look back and see how far you have come.

How to feel more energetic. Celebrate your successes. Give yourself credit when you accomplish something. Look at your progress, not at what's left to be done. • Try naps, or schedule rest periods throughout the day. Rest as long as you need to feel refreshed. • Learn to relax. Sometimes the harder you try to do something, the harder it is to do. You become tense, anxious and frustrated. All this takes more energy. Being relaxed lets you use your energy more efficiently. • Do something you enjoy every day. A positive attitude or experience helps a lot to boost energy levels. • Be social. It is very important that you get back into the "swing of things" and stay involved with friends and family. Go out into the community and interact with friends, family and other people. • Physical activity is important. With permission from your doctor, consider joining a health and wellness program.