



## **Education**

### **Fatigue**

#### **What is fatigue?**

Fatigue is a condition of tiredness or weakness that is physical or mental, or both.

#### **How does it occur?**

Fatigue can happen for many reasons, but it is especially likely when you are having a lot of physical or mental stress. Fatigue may be caused by:

- an illness
- hormone problems
- overexertion
- poor physical condition
- lack of exercise
- not enough sleep
- overweight
- poor diet
- stress
- emotional or psychological problems, especially depression
- some medicines.

Fatigue can also be a symptom of a heart attack, especially in women. In this case, it usually is new and is severe fatigue that starts a day or two or just a few hours before a heart attack. Sometimes the fatigue starts a couple of weeks before a heart attack. Because new, unexplained fatigue can mean a heart attack is about to happen, it should be checked by your health care provider.

Overwhelming fatigue that lasts for at least 6 months and interferes with your daily life may be caused by a medical problem called chronic fatigue syndrome.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of fatigue are:

- weakness
- tiredness
- indifference
- lack of energy.

#### **How is it diagnosed?**

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and ask about your daily routine, work habits, environment, and emotional well-being. Your provider may examine you. You may have blood tests to check for diseases that can cause fatigue, such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, heart disease, lung disease, and anemia.

#### **How is it treated?**

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The treatment depends on the cause. If fatigue is a symptom of another condition or illness, that condition or disease will be the focus of treatment. If the cause is emotional or psychological, your health care provider may refer you to a therapist for counseling.

If new fatigue is caused by worsening heart health, prompt recognition and treatment of heart disease may prevent a heart attack.

### **How long do the effects last?**

The effects will last as long as the cause of the symptoms exists.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

- Get enough rest and sleep.
- Eat a healthy diet. If you are overweight, begin a weight loss program after checking with your health care provider.
- Walk or exercise according to your health care provider's recommendations. Exercise can increase your energy and improve your mood.
- See a counselor if you are having emotional problems.
- Learn to use deep breathing techniques, visualization, and meditation to relieve stress.
- Allow yourself time to relax and do things you enjoy.
- Meet new people and develop new interests.

### **How can I prevent fatigue?**

- If you are working longer hours or doing more physical work, allow yourself more time to sleep or rest.
- If your work activity has become more strenuous, take breaks during the day to sit and rest.
- Ask your provider about taking vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Consider eating smaller meals 4 to 6 times a day if that seems to help you maintain a higher energy level. Eat more complex carbohydrates such as rice and pasta, and eat less fat. Avoid foods that contain a lot of sugar. Avoid overeating.
- Stop smoking.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and other drugs. In addition to their other negative effects, they can keep you from sleeping well.

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