

FATIGUE



Fatigue is a common symptom of MS, regardless of the severity of the disease. Like all symptoms of MS, fatigue is experienced differently by each individual.

Fatigue is commonly divided into 2 types – primary fatigue and secondary fatigue. Primary fatigue is experienced as a direct result of damage to the central nervous system caused by MS. Secondary fatigue results from factors which may not be directly related to MS.

Types of primary fatigue

Lassitude: is an overwhelming exhaustion, tiredness or sleepiness which is not related to participation in activity. It can occur suddenly without any warning, at any time of day and can last from a few hours to a few days.

Neuromuscular fatigue: is caused by inefficient nerve conduction and results in the slowing and eventual inability to complete physical activity until the person has stopped activity, rested and regained energy.

Types of secondary fatigue

Sleep disturbance: this can include difficulties getting to sleep, staying asleep or not getting the right kind of sleep.

These difficulties can be caused by a number of MS symptoms such as pain, muscle cramps, depression or urinary urgency.

Heat: a rise in body temperature can often affect the experience of fatigue. This can occur for example in hot weather conditions, by having a hot bath or eating a hot meal.

Medications: some medications have side effects that can affect fatigue such as anti spasmodics.

Pain: fatigue can be directly increased by pain and/or indirectly for example by disrupting sleep.

Diet: the body has many nutritional needs including vitamins and minerals which if not provided may affect fatigue.

Infection: can cause an increase in core body temperature, reduce endurance and decrease the body's ability to work efficiently thereby increasing fatigue.

Overactivity: can occur when too many activities are undertaken over a period of time. Each person has an individual limit of what they can do before they may experience fatigue.

Stress: may be experienced for many reasons and can affect fatigue.

Depression: may be experienced as a symptom of MS due to nerve damage or the emotional impact of MS. If left untreated depression can affect fatigue.

Loss of muscle strength

(deconditioning): symptoms of MS can result in a decrease of physical activity thereby reducing muscle activity resulting in loss of strength. More effort is then required to undertake activities which can affect fatigue.

Environment: many factors within the environment can make activities require more effort. For example, poor lighting increases the visual effort needed to complete activities thereby affecting fatigue.

Compensatory fatigue: this type of fatigue can result from the extra effort and energy required to undertake tasks. This may be due to the effects of many MS symptoms such as mobility, vision and concentration difficulties. For

example, the effects of MS may result in inefficient movement therefore more physical effort may be required to undertake routine tasks.

Fatigue management

The aim of fatigue management is to reduce the effects of fatigue. As each person has a different experience of fatigue it is important to trial a range of strategies in order to find the ones that work best for you.

It is also important to consider all factors that may contribute to the MS fatigue you experience such as the types of secondary fatigue listed. These factors have the ability to increase mild fatigue into a more prominent symptom of MS. It may be useful to discuss possible contributing factors with a health professional.

Listen to your body

It is important to work within your limits and listen to your body at all times. Whenever you begin to feel fatigued it is important to stop all activity as soon as possible and rest.

Monitoring

Aim to continually monitor the fatigue you experience in order to determine whether specific fatigue management strategies are effective.

Fatigue can be monitored in a number of ways and may assist you to identify activities that trigger fatigue. You can use a casual approach and simply remain aware of how you feel throughout the day, or a more formal approach can be used such as a written fatigue diary. A fatigue diary can be used to record the activities you complete throughout the day and the level of fatigue you experience.

For more information about using a formal diary to monitor your fatigue or to attend a 6 week fatigue management course contact a health professional at the MS Society.

Other fatigue management strategies

Additional information sheets are available covering a range of fatigue management strategies. These include [Fatigue Treatments – Making Informed Decisions](#), [Exercise and Diet](#), [Keeping Cool](#), [Managing Stress](#), [Fatigue Self Assessment](#), and [Planning Your Day](#).

If you are interested in finding out more information

MS Society of Australia

About MS- How MS can affect you- Cognitive Problems.

<http://www.msaustralia.org.au/symptoms-cognitive.asp>

MS Society of Queensland

Understanding & Managing Cognitive, Emotional & Behavioral Changes in Multiple Sclerosis-. By Christine Leech.

<http://www.msqld.org/how-we-help/information/cognitive-changes-book>

MS Society of Canada

Living well with MS: Managing fatigue

http://mssociety.ca/en/information/symptoms_mng_fatigue.htm

National MS Society of USA

Cognitive function <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/about-multiple-sclerosis/what-we-know-about-ms/symptoms/cognitive-function/index.aspx>

Emotional changes <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/about-multiple-sclerosis/what-we-know-about-ms/symptoms/emotional-changes/index.aspx>

Multiple Sclerosis Trust

Cognition fact sheet <http://www.mstrust.org.uk/downloads/cognition.pdf>

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MS House, 110 Reservoir Road, MODBURY SA 5092

Phone (08) 8396 0044 Fax: (08) 83 96 0184 Toll Free: 1800 812 311

Website www.ms.asn.au

Email: info@ms.asn.au