

FATIGUE MANAGING STRESS



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Stress and Multiple Sclerosis

Everyday life can often be stressful. Stressful situations can have physical, social and emotional effects which can be positive or negative depending on the situation and person.

Some people perform best when stressed and without it may find it difficult to have motivation.

However, some people find that they can no longer cope with normal day to day tasks due to the effects and pressures of stress.

For people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) there can be a large number of added stresses such as the unpredictability of symptoms, anticipation of the next exacerbation and possible cognitive changes. If a person with MS is experiencing stress, they may find their experience of MS fatigue is increased as more energy is needed to think, problem solve, and handle daily life. Stress may be further increased when other people don't understand the fatigue you experience. For example, they may misinterpret it as laziness. Therefore fatigue and

stress in MS can influence each other resulting in an ongoing cycle. Avoiding or eliminating stress is probably an impossible task, therefore the best approach is to learn how to manage the stress you experience more effectively.

As fatigue is experienced differently by each person, different strategies may be successful. For this reason it is important to trial a range of strategies in order to identify those that work for you. Although use of the following strategies is unlikely to eliminate fatigue they aim to enable you to manage the fatigue you experience more effectively.

Recognising stress

Identifying what causes you to experience stress is the first step in learning how to manage it. Consider what events or concerns cause you to experience increased stress. By doing this you can be more aware of stressful situations and can plan your schedule to reduce these occurrences. If this is not possible you can try to be more prepared

for these situations and aim to minimize the stress you experience.

Planning a balanced life

By planning your daily and weekly schedule it may be possible to reduce the stress you experience. When planning your day, prioritize the most important activities and space these out across the day leaving time for relaxation and leisure. Aim to allow time to refresh and revitalize yourself between activities so you can maximize your health and wellbeing and decrease the stress you may be experiencing.

Be flexible

Aim to be flexible with your daily tasks. Allow yourself to leave tasks unfinished and aim to complete them later or get someone else to help. Instead of working to a time frame, work to a check list and tick activities off when completed. This allows you to change your plans according to how your body is feeling as well as helping you to remember the tasks you want to complete.

Nutrition

Eating regular meals as part of a well balanced diet of nutritious foods will help you to deal with everyday stress.

Fresh air

This is important on a daily basis. If you can't go outside, sit near an open window and air rooms that you spend lots of time in.

Exercise

Any regular physical activity has been found to reduce stress, for example, walking, swimming, gardening or stretching while seated. To develop a suitable exercise program please contact a physiotherapist at the MS Society.

Relaxation strategies

Relaxation is used to release tension and stress. A number of methods of relaxation are outlined below, but there are many more available.

Yoga: involves breathing exercises and gentle stretching and aims to increase energy and flexibility.

Visualization Techniques:

Recordings are available with descriptions of relaxing scenes such as a beach or waterfall and are accompanied by peaceful music. Alternatively you can imagine your own scenes while listening to music of your choice.

Tai Chi: involves gentle movement patterns which aim to improve physical and mental health. It has the potential to reduce fatigue and stress as well as improve balance.

Other relaxation techniques include rest, meditation, progressive muscular relaxation, and massage.

Depression

Some symptoms of stress are very similar to those of depression. If you feel you are having emotional difficulties, it is important to discuss these with a health professional as if left untreated, depression can affect MS fatigue.

Other fatigue management strategies

Additional information sheets are available covering a range of fatigue management strategies. The Society has more information sheets included in the symptom series as well as a Healthy Living and Managing MS Series. Please see the website for more details.

If you have any questions or require further information about MS fatigue and its management please contact your GP or health professional at the MS Society

References

Foley, F & Sarnoff, J 2002, 'Taming Stress in Multiple Sclerosis', National Multiple Sclerosis Society, USA, <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/living-with-multiple-sclerosis/healthy-living/stress/index.aspx>

MS Society Ireland, Stress Management

http://mssociety.ie/uploads/File/stresssheet_nov04.pdf

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Support network

Sharing your personal thoughts and feelings can help to manage stress. Talking with others can help you to view factors which may cause stress from a different perspective. By talking and sharing your feelings, others may be able to relate and have greater understanding thereby decreasing the potential for stressful situations.

Talking to a health professional such as a social worker may also help to reduce the stress you experience as well as assist you to discuss your situation with others.