

# FATIGUE

## PLANNING YOUR DAY



Multiple Sclerosis Society  
of SA & NT

### Why is planning important?

There are many strategies which you can use to help make your daily routine and specific tasks easier. These strategies include planning and organisation, prioritising tasks, breaking tasks up, making tasks easier, changing the space you work in, including rest breaks, and asking for help when needed.

These strategies aim to decrease the amount of effort required in order to conserve energy and reduce fatigue.

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 the fatigue you experience, they aim to enable you to manage the fatigue you experience more effectively.

### Listen to your body

It is important to work within your abilities and listen to your body at all times.

Stop activity and rest as soon as you begin to feel fatigued. Be careful not to overdo it on days when you are feeling less fatigued as you may experience severe fatigue the following day as a result.

### Planning and organisation

Planning your day is an important strategy that can help manage fatigue. Difficult tasks can be spread across the day or week with easier, less fatiguing tasks spaced in between. Consider the best time of day to complete certain tasks. For example, if you feel less fatigued in the morning then the evening meal could be prepared earlier and reheated when needed. If the fatigue you experience is increased by heat, aim to undertake activities within the cooler parts of the day especially when going outside. For example, shopping could be completed in the morning when the temperature is cooler.

### **Prioritising tasks**

Tasks can be listed each day or week and prioritised to identify the order of tasks which you aim to undertake. This can also help to identify tasks that can be left for later, completed by others or eliminated altogether. For example, instead of drying the dishes they can be left to dry overnight and put away in the morning. It is also important to be flexible, acknowledge when it is unachievable to undertake or complete certain tasks and reschedule as needed.

### **Breaking tasks up**

Large tasks can be broken up into a number of smaller tasks and spaced across the day as needed. This allows for other tasks to be undertaken in between and for rests breaks to be included. For example, strenuous cleaning tasks such as vacuuming can be divided into many tasks. Each room can be treated as a separate task and undertaken at different times.

### **Changing tasks to make them easier**

Changing the way you undertake tasks can help make activities easier. For example, to save energy you can complete tasks while seated as this requires less effort than standing.

Other examples include soaking dishes in hot soapy water prior to washing and using a quilt instead of sheets and blankets in order to reduce the amount of effort needed to make and/or change the bed linen.

### **Change the space you work in**

The area you work in can be organised to reduce the effort needed to undertake tasks. For example, keep frequently used items within close reach to reduce reaching, bending and carrying which all require energy.

When undertaking an activity such as cooking all of the essential items can be organised and placed within one area prior to beginning the activity in order to reduce any unnecessary movement and effort.

### **Include time to rest**

Rest breaks should be taken at appropriate times throughout the day as needed. Rest can be divided into three types including sleeping, resting specific muscle groups and relaxation. An example of resting a specific muscle group could be sitting as this rests leg muscles. It may be helpful to undertake a task requiring walking or movement followed by a task that can be carried out while sitting allowing the leg muscles to rest.

### **Ask for help when necessary**

Be willing to ask family and friends for help when needed. Expectations may however need to be altered when tasks are undertaken by others.

### **Other fatigue management strategies**

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

### **Further Information**

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. Additionally if you would like to discuss personalised planning strategies please contact a health professional at the MS Society.

### **References**

**Multiple Sclerosis Foundation** Energy Conservation and Work Simplification for People with Multiple Sclerosis

<http://www.msfocus.org/article/details.aspx?articleID=36>[http://www.msfacts.org/publications/pub\\_articles\\_energy.html](http://www.msfacts.org/publications/pub_articles_energy.html).

Ward, N & Winters, N 2003, 'Results of a Fatigue Management Programme in Multiple Sclerosis', British Journal of Nursing, vol. 12, no. 18.

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