

Are You Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired?

How to beat fatigue naturally!

Do you jump out of bed with a smile and energized for the new day, or do you force yourself out of bed and drag yourself through the day like you're carrying lead weights? This is often more than just standard tiredness, its fatigue. With our stressful busy lives, most people experience tiredness from time-to-time, but usually this resolves with rest and relaxation. For an increasing number of people however, persistent tiredness or fatigue is a major problem.

Fatigue is a common condition in Australia and New Zealand, and is often misunderstood or even worse dismissed. This may occur if there is no identifiable 'cause' discovered in diagnostic procedures, such as blood tests, but that doesn't mean if you can't find a 'cause' you should stop striving to feel more energised.

Fatigue occurs if the mechanisms which provide the body with energy are not working effectively. The result is everything slows down, physically and mentally, and normal function becomes increasingly difficult. This resulting low energy and enthusiasm affects all facets of life – relationships, performance at work, chance of driving accidents, desire to eat well and exercise etc.

The common mechanisms that can lead to decreased energy production are:

- Low iron/B12 and folate
- Inflammation and infection



- Hormonal imbalances such as low thyroid hormones
- Digestive and liver toxicity
- Excess body fat and unstable blood sugars
- Stress and mood changes.

Let's go over a few of these problems in more depth.

Low Iron, B12 or Folate

Iron or B vitamin deficiency is a common situation that results in decreased transport of oxygen throughout the body leading to 'tired blood' and 'tired tissues'. Iron is also required for the creation of energy at the mitochondrial level, and for synthesis of carnitine – a mitochondrial fuel.

If iron deficiency is only mild or moderate, fatigue is often only noticed after physical exertion as opposed to constant fatigue. This is due to the increased need for oxygen and the 'tired blood' is unable to provide it.

Iron levels and iron stores can be gauged through blood tests. It is interesting to note you may have low iron for several months before it is reflected in blood tests due to the turnover rate of the cells that transport the iron throughout the body – the red blood cells.

Vitamins B12 and folic acid deficiency and digestive insufficiency may also result in fatigue. Iron, B12 or folic acid deficiency may be suspected if fatigue is accompanied by:

- Pale and dry skin
- Poorly formed and upturned nails
- Difficulty staying warm in cold weather
- Poor memory and concentration
- Lowered immune function, therefore increased rate of infections
- Vegetarian or vegan diet
- Chronic use of antacids or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, steroid use, aspirin
- High intake of coffee or black tea with meals.

Stress and mood changes

Last but by no means least, is the effect of stress on energy production and motivation. Stress is a necessary and needed response to switch us into the 'go' position when we need it. We must switch back to 'stop' to ensure that the body has the time to rejuvenate and get ready for the next 'go' requirement. Things go awry when the 'stop' mechanism is not functioning correctly and the stressors keep building up until eventually 'burn out' occurs, leading to mood changes and chronic fatigue. The stress messengers are reliant on various nutrients to ensure they function correctly and, if deficient, the process may not run as smoothly. A number of herbs have also been found to assist in switching to the 'off' position.

Excess stress may be suspected if fatigue is accompanied by:

- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Trembling

- Dilation of pupils
- Phobias
- Pre-menstrual syndrome
- Panic attacks
- Decreased appetite.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome may be suspected if fatigue is accompanied by:

- Mild fever
- Sore throat
- Painful lymph nodes
- Muscle weakness
- Headaches
- Sleep disturbance
- Muscular or joint pain or tenderness, especially when no specific pattern throughout the body

The other side of the coin is when low mood is partnered with anxiety instead of indifference or apathy. Though they may seem like they are opposite in nature, a vicious cycle of depression and loneliness may lead to fear and anxiety, which in turn leads to exhaustion and then further depression and fatigue – and so it goes on. Low mood and anxiety may be suspected if fatigue is accompanied by:

- Nervousness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Agitation
- Irritability
- Racing thoughts
- Frustration
- 'Panic attacks' with bouts of breathlessness, pounding heart, head spinning, feelings of terror, sense of loss of control.

Here are a few basic but very sound ways to make sure you build a strong foundation for healthy energy levels.

1. Get adequate, regular and consistent amounts of sleep each night. A sleep cycle of eight hours is recommended, however some people require 9-10 hours, not falling into 'sleep debt' is essential. 'Sleep debt' is the notion that if we need 8 hours and only get 7 hours, then we are 1 hour in 'debt' and that hour needs to be 'topped up'. The ultimate goal is going to bed and waking at the same time each day (yes that means no weekend marathon sleep-ins).

2. Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water throughout the day. Depending on the quality and balance of food, your daily diet can either be a medicine or a poison, creating a considerable impact on your energy and vitality. Returning to basics regarding food is one of the best things you can do for your body and often results in increased energy. Naturally 'fresh is best' and avoiding processed foods is always preferable. Organic, free-range choices are best when available. Locating and buying at a local produce market makes the process easier to put in place as they frequently provide seasonal produce at a cheaper cost.

3. Exercise Regularly. Regular physical activity helps address many of the underlying mechanisms that may

cause or perpetuate fatigue, including stress, immune system problems, unstable blood sugars, mood changes, irritability and excess body fat. Exercise can help manage symptoms and improve physical functioning in people suffering from fatigue. If you have been suffering from long term fatigue it is suggested that you create a graded exercise plan so that you start gently and gradually increase.

4. Learn Better Ways to Relax. We all have stressful aspects to our lives – work, family, finances and illness. When the stress that we feel from these issues is not resolved quickly, we may find our health and wellbeing really start to suffer. Stress is a part of modern day living, it's therefore important to put in place techniques to manage it in an effort to limit the negative impact stress may have on your body. It is also beneficial to work on ways to reduce your exposure to stressful situations in the first place, which is always easier said than done, but definitely worth thinking about.

Often issues that seem to be very important, and require your immediate attention, can resolve themselves without your input. Sometimes not getting involved in every issue can reduce your exposure to stressful situations. Ask yourself whether the current issue would resolve itself eventually if you were not available, and if the answer is yes, then you can choose to not play a role. One of the keys to managing stress is to understand that your inbuilt stress response is designed to support physical activity. Many people find that Yoga and Tai Chi, both traditional forms of exercise which also incorporate relaxation and stress management techniques, are highly beneficial to calm the mind and 'switch off' the stress response. They are slow and gentle, and can be performed by just about anyone.

Deep breathing exercises can also assist in relieving stress and, when performed daily, provides a cumulative benefit as it becomes easier to relax into the breathing. The exercises are best performed laying flat on the back on a hard surface, usually the floor. Bend the knees and relax the body (particularly the mouth, nose, and face). One hand should be placed on the abdomen to monitor how deep the breath goes. The aim as you breathe is for the abdomen to rise further than the chest. Take a series of long, deep breaths through the nose, attempting to raise the abdomen instead of the chest. Placing a hand on both the chest and the abdomen may help you gauge the height of the abdomen. Deep breathing can be continued for up to 20 minutes.

5. Avoid stimulants or excess alcohol. All too often it might seem tempting to use stimulants - coffee, energy drinks, high sugar foods and even drugs – to give you a 'kick' when you are tired and unmotivated. The benefit from this artificial 'up' is short lived and, ultimately, leaves the body even worse off than before as they artificially 'rev up' the metabolism. What goes up must come down and quite often comes crashing down after a false 'up'.

Quick Hints:

- Keep high glycaemic load foods (potato, bread, pasta and rice) to a minimum
- Eat two pieces of fruit or one cup daily if you are trying to lose weight
- Eat fresh vegetables, a minimum of three cups daily
- Regular exercise, a minimum 30 minutes most days
- Make sure you take time out for yourself, be selfish
- Take up tai chi, yoga or meditation to help reduce your stress levels
- Having fun and doing things that make you happy and laughter must be a priority as it lifts your vitality
- Don't try and take on the world – it's too big!

Fortunately nature has provided us with the means to ensure the mitochondria have the necessary nutrients to maximize output and enhance your energy levels. As every person is different, so is your need for certain supplements. Naturally it's important to also address any of the underlying drivers which were previously discussed. For more information and professional help please contact your natural healthcare provider.

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