

# Fatigue

## What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness or weakness. The fatigue may be physical or mental.

## 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, such as thyroid problems
- overexertion
- poor physical condition
- lack of exercise
- not enough sleep
- overweight
- poor diet
- stress
- emotional or psychological problems, especially depression or grief
- 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 healthcare 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?

Some ways of describing the feelings of fatigue are:

- weakness
- tiredness
- indifference or lack of interest in the things you usually enjoy
- lack of energy
- lack of your usual endurance or stamina.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will review your symptoms and ask about your daily routine, work habits, environment, medicines, 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?

The treatment depends on the cause. If fatigue is a symptom of another condition or illness, such as thyroid problems, that condition or disease will be the focus of treatment. If the cause is emotional or psychological, your healthcare provider may counsel you or refer you to a therapist for evaluation and 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 healthcare provider.
- Walk or exercise according to your healthcare provider's recommendations. Exercise can increase your energy, improve your mood, and help you sleep better.
- See a counselor if you are having emotional problems or family or work-related stress.
- 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 whole grains (flour, rice, and pasta made from whole grains), 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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