

Excellence in rural healthcare

Managing Fatigue and Conserving Energy

Occupational Therapy

www.ulh.nhs.uk

What is fatigue management?

Fatigue is an experience of severe mental and/or physical tiredness. It is a different intensity to the tiredness which we might normally feel after a busy day. It affects everyone differently and can affect all areas of your life.

When you are experiencing fatigue, common symptoms include:

- A feeling of low energy or strength
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Difficulty sleeping
- Dizziness or light headedness
- Difficulty doing everyday activities

What is energy conservation?

Energy conservation is about changing your lifestyle in order to minimise the amount of energy you use while carrying out everyday tasks. It is about finding your own balance between rest and activity.

How to conserve energy in daily life

Planning

- Prioritise activities to use your energy wisely.
- Forward planning. Make sure that you rest before and/or after a busy time.
- Be realistic about what you want to achieve.
- Be aware of local services. You could get your shopping delivered or use a mobile library.
- Be aware of statutory and voluntary services. This includes disabled parking badges, Motability and Meals on Wheels.

Pacing

- Break activities down into small parts.
- Listen to your body, don't fight it. If you are having a day where you feel particularly tired, don't push yourself.
- Take regular breaks.

Positioning

- Sit down when completing activities if it is possible. This could include activities from meal preparation to brushing your teeth.
- Store items which are regularly used together to minimize using extra energy.

Energy conservation tips

You may like to consider some of the following ideas to help you conserve energy and perform everyday tasks. Do not forget to ask for help from people around you.

Housekeeping

- Clean a different room each day and spread tasks over the week.
- Use long handled dusters, cleaning attachments and mops to avoid bending and stretching.
- Sit down while you are completing tasks wherever possible.
- Use an “easy reach” when picking things up from the floor. Advice can be provided by your occupational therapist.

Gardening

- Sit down while you are completing tasks in the garden.
- Consider raised beds which will require less bending.
- Use long handled gardening equipment.
- Take regular breaks.
- Plan ahead so that tasks are broken down into manageable parts.

Shopping

- Make a shopping list which corresponds to the layout of the shop.
- Shop at a time when the shop will be less busy.
- Use a shopping trolley or a wheeled shopping basket.
- Take advantage of any store assistance such as help with packing bags, loading the car or reaching high and low shelves.
- Use an online shopping service or shop over the phone.
- If you are disabled, obtain a blue disability parking badge from social services. This enables you to park in spaces which are generally the closest to the entrance.

Preparing a meal

- Choose simple meals and cook larger quantities and freeze in individual portions.
- Prepare part of the meal earlier in the day, such as the vegetables.
- Gather all the necessary items before beginning.
- Sit whilst preparing some parts of the meal and while washing up to avoid bending and stretching.
- Use tinned or frozen vegetables whenever possible.
- Rest after each meal is prepared before clearing up.
- Encourage family members to help assist as much as possible.
- Eat precooked/convenience meals.
- Slide equipment rather than lift.
- Use dishes you can serve from to save on washing up or use a dishwasher if you have one.
- Ask others to move heavy items to the table or serve portions by the stove.
- Let dishes soak to reduce effort required to clean and leave them to air dry.
- Rearrange cupboards to place frequently used equipment at worktop height and within easy reach.
- Use a kitchen trolley to transport items if you have difficulty carrying them.

Washing and dressing

- Sit down when getting dressed, especially when putting on your socks, tights, trousers and shoes.
- Get dressed in an area where all clothes can be reached easily.
- Wear clothes which are easy to put on and take off.
- Put underwear and trousers on at the same time so that you can pull them up together.
- Use dressing aids if necessary, your occupational therapist can provide information.
- Bring your feet up rather than bending down.
- Consider wearing a towelling dressing gown after shower or bath as this uses less energy to get dry.
- Have grab rails fitted in convenient places in the bathroom, your occupational therapist can help you with this.
- Keep all items which you will need together and carry them to the bathroom in the same trip.
- Sit to undress, bathe, dry and dress.
- Allow plenty of time.
- Consider bathing in the evening when you have more time.

Laundry

- Wash small loads at a time.
- Transfer wet clothes into the dryer a few at a time.
- Use a laundry basket or trolley to move washing to and from the washing machine.
- Use a fold away drying rack for small items.
- Get help to hang up washing.
- Use a peg bag or apron to hold pegs.
- Sit to iron and sort clothes.
- Use a lightweight iron.
- Slide the iron onto a heat proof pad to avoid lifting.
- Wear clothes which do not need to be ironed, or require little ironing.
- Get help to fold large items such as bedding.
- Sort and fold washing on a table.

Stairs

- Use the hand rail for support. Think about having a second hand rail fitted.
- Place the whole of the foot on the step.
- Pause at least one second between each step.
- Used purse lipped breathing while climbing stairs (exhaling through tightly pursed lips and inhaling through the nose).
- Ascend the stairs using your 'good' leg leading, where appropriate.
- Descend the stairs with your 'bad' leg leading, where appropriate.
- Take the stairs one step at a time with both feet on the step.

Leisure

- If you are too tired to read a book, listen to an audiobook instead.
- Listen to the radio and podcasts.
- If you feel too tired to see friends and family, let them know. You could have a phone call instead.

Driving

- If you feel tired then it is better to avoid driving as it can be dangerous because you are less alert and unable to concentrate properly.
- Ask a friend or family member to drive.
- If you need to drive somewhere, plan the journey for the time of day when you usually feel the most alert.
- Plan regular stops to allow time to rest. This may include an overnight stop.
- If you are attending an appointment, phone the nurse or doctor to see if help is available.
- If you feel tired when driving, stop in a safe place and take a break.

Fatigue diary

This is a fatigue diary which you can use to keep a record of your daily energy levels. Knowing how you feel at different times can be helpful when you are planning your daily activities.

To use this diary, put a cross in the box which best described your energy levels in the morning and the afternoon on the 1 to 5 scale. The guide for scoring is:

1. No fatigue
2. Mild fatigue - "I am aware that I am tired but able to continue with activities"
3. Moderate fatigue - "I am feeling more tired and need to slow down with activities"
4. Extreme fatigue - "I am needing to take breaks during activities"
5. The worst fatigue - "I am unable to continue with any activities"

You may wish to photocopy this page so that you can use the diary for more than one week.

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week commencing date:	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM
Energy Level							
	1						
		2					
			3				
				4			
					5		

Sleep

Sleeping too little, or too much can cause fatigue. It is vital to get enough sleep to enable you to function and fulfil your daily activities. Here are some tips which can help you get a better sleeping pattern.

- Avoid napping during the day.
- Decrease the amount of caffeine which you drink, particularly after midday. You could switch to an alternative such as decaffeinated coffee and tea.
- Don't eat or drink large quantities before bed.
- Establish a bedtime routine.
- Aim to wind down an hour before you go to bed.
- Cutting out alcohol may help.
- Don't smoke cigarettes before bedtime or during the night.
- Take regular exercise in the day but not within three hours of bedtime.
- Try to use your bedroom for relaxing activities, so that it remains a peaceful environment - dark, quiet and a comfortable temperature.
- A warm bath can help to relax tired muscles.
- Listen to a relaxation app or tape.
- A Mindfulness programme may help you sleep.

What is mindfulness?

Professor Mark Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, says that mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment.

How to be more mindful

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness.

Notice the everyday

"Even as we go about our daily lives, we can notice the sensations of things, the food we eat, the air moving past the body as we walk," says Professor Williams. "All this may sound very small, but it has huge power to interrupt the 'autopilot' mode we often engage day to day and to give us new perspectives on life."

Keep it regular

It can be helpful to pick a regular time - the morning journey to work or a walk at lunchtime - during which you decide to be aware of the sensations created by the world around you.

Try something new

Trying new things, such as sitting in a different seat in meetings or going somewhere new for lunch, can also help you notice the world in a new way.

Watch your thoughts

"Some people find it very difficult to practice mindfulness. As soon as they stop what they're doing, lots of thoughts and worries crowd in" says Professor Williams.

"It might be useful to remember that mindfulness isn't about making these thoughts go away, but rather about seeing them as mental events".

"Imagine standing at a bus station and seeing 'thought buses' coming and going without having to get on them and be taken away. This can be very hard at first, but with gentle persistence it is possible".

"Some people find that it is easier to cope with an over-busy mind if they are doing gentle yoga or walking".

Name thoughts and feelings

To develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings, some people find it helpful to silently name them: "Here's the thought that I might fail that exam". Or, "This is anxiety".

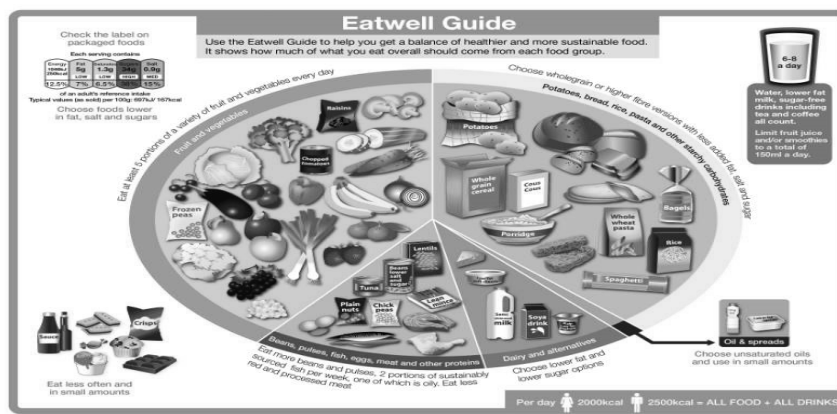
Free yourself from the past and future

You can practise mindfulness anywhere, but it can be especially helpful to take a mindful approach if you realise that, for several minutes, you have been "trapped" in reliving past problems or "pre-living" future worries.

Diet

Eating a healthy and balanced diet will provide you with the nutrients that your body needs to maintain energy levels and an increased sense of wellbeing. Here is some guidance on how you can achieve this.

- Drink plenty of fluids - mainly water and tea without sugar, or sugar free drinks. Reduce your coffee intake. Women should drink 1.5 litres/3 pints a day and men should drink 2 litres or 3.5 pints a day.
- Eat 5 fruit and vegetable portions every day.
- You should avoid drinking more than 2 to 3 units of alcohol 5 days a week.
- The picture below shows you how much of each food groups you should try to eat.
- It is recommended that you eat regularly and do not skip meals.
- Your GP can give advice on healthy eating or refer you to a dietician for more advice.
- A full size interactive Eatwell guide is available at www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx



Physical activity

Physical activity can reduce the symptoms of fatigue. Plan regular activity or light exercise into your day. For example:

- Light exercise such as walking.
- Strengthening exercises such as standing up and sitting down.
- Activities which involve gentle stretching, balance and movement such as Yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi.
- Gardening is a good way to keep active.

Some tips to remember:

- Pay attention to how your body reacts to activity and exercise.
- Drink plenty of fluids whilst exercising.
- Make sure you balance activity with rest.

Relaxation

Making time for activities which make you relax is important for preventing and dealing with fatigue.

- Try to avoid situations that make you anxious.
- Talk to others about anything which might be worrying you.
- Find the relaxation tools which work for you.
- Try finding enjoyable activities which take your mind off worrying thoughts.

Further information

British Association of Occupational Therapy

Website: www.rcot.co.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Website: www.csp.org.uk

British Dietetic Association

Tel: 0121 200 80 80

Website: www.bda.uk.com

Public Health England

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Disability parking badges

Website: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Age UK Advice

Tel: 0800 1696565

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area

Motability

Website: www.motability.co.uk

Contact details

If you have any other problems/queries please contact:

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On..... Ext

Therapists work with people of all ages, helping them to carry out the activities they need to do in order to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

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