

Fatigue

- **Many polio survivors suffer from fatigue**
- **There are some things you can do to help manage fatigue**
- **Other medical causes for fatigue should be ruled out**

Fatigue is a very common symptom for people who have had polio. This fatigue is different from just feeling tired. It can make it hard for you to do your normal daily activities, and it might be hard to think clearly or stay alert.

It is important that your doctor does a full assessment on the possible causes for your fatigue, such as breathing and sleep problems, depression or other medical conditions.

What Is Fatigue?

Fatigue goes beyond normal tiredness. It is often out of proportion with the amount of activity a person does. It can have many causes, including the overuse of polio-damaged nerves and muscles. Fatigue can be described as:

General Fatigue

- often occurs every day, and increases throughout the day
- can include aching (like the flu), hot and cold flushes and sweating
- very little energy, and low physical and mental endurance

Muscle Fatigue

- muscles lose strength when they have been used too much
- Muscles can feel tired, heavy, weak and lacking in stamina
- strength will often return after some rest

Tips To Manage Fatigue



Fatigue Diary

Keep a record of what you do each day, and rate your fatigue out of ten. Many people will notice a pattern. For example, they notice more fatigue with certain activities or at particular times of the day.

Planning

Once you are more aware of your patterns of fatigue, plan your day around this. For example, plan rest breaks into the time of day when you usually feel the most fatigue. Also, plan so that you have plenty of time to get things done - rushing might increase your fatigue.

Pacing

Try not to push yourself to the point where you "hit the wall". Using your fatigue diary, get a sense of how long you can do an activity before your fatigue increases, then develop a habit of resting before that point.

Prioritising

Before you do something, think about how necessary it is. Consider letting some things go, or doing them less often, so that you have more energy for the things you really want to do.

Delegating

Is there anyone who can help you get some things done? This might be family, friends or professional services (Polio Australia has [information on available services on their website](#)). This will give you more energy for other activities.

Positioning

Think about how you can do things in ways that preserve your energy. For example, it takes more energy to stand than to sit. You could consider sitting to get dressed, chop vegetables at a table, or brush your teeth.

Equipment

Assistive technology includes equipment that can make a task easier and reduce fatigue. For example, using a wheeled walker, shower chair or mobility scooter might allow you to get things done without too much fatigue.

Listen To Your Body

Be aware of the signs of fatigue, both physical and mental. Stop doing an activity if you have those symptoms. Examples could be muscle soreness, weakness, tiredness, trembling, clenching your jaw or grimacing.

Fatigue And Exercise

Some people think that exercise will make their fatigue worse, so they do as little as possible. Others try to use activity or exercise as a way of "beating" fatigue, weakness or pain. Pay attention to how you feel with activity as it helps us know how much we can do. Using the tips in this fact sheet, and others that may work for you, try to stay as active as you can.

A neurological physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can assess you and provide a tailored exercise program based on your specific needs. Make sure you rest frequently, and inform your health professional about any increase in fatigue during and after exercise.

For more information about exercise, see Polio Australia's [exercise fact sheet](#).

More Information

- Talk to your general practitioner about possible causes of your fatigue
- See an **occupational therapist** to help make changes to your daily routine to reduce the impact of fatigue
- See a **neurological physiotherapist or exercise physiologist** for a tailored exercise program

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