Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of tiredness, lack of energy, lack of motivation, or feeling tired all the time. Having enough rest, good nutrition, and reducing stress will normally reduce fatigue. Consult your caregiver if it persists. The nature of your fatigue will help your caregiver to find out its cause. The treatment is based on the cause.

CAUSES

There are many causes for fatigue. Most of the time, fatigue can be traced to one or more of your habits or routines. Most causes fit into one or more of three general areas. They are:

Lifestyle problems

- Sleep disturbances.
- Overwork.
- Physical exertion.
- Unhealthy habits
  - Poor eating habits or eating disorders
  - Alcohol and/or drug use
  - Lack of proper nutrition (*malnutrition*).

Psychological problems

- Stress and/or anxiety problems.
- Depression.
- Grief.
- Boredom.

Medical Problems or Conditions

- Anemia.
- Pregnancy.
- Thyroid gland problems.
- Recovery from major surgery.
- Continuous pain.
- Emphysema or asthma that is not well controlled
- Allergic conditions.
- Diabetes.
- Infections (such as mononucleosis).
- Obesity.
- Sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea.
- Heart failure or other heart-related problems.
- Cancer.
- Kidney disease.
- Liver disease.
- Effects of certain medicines such as antihistamines, cough and cold remedies, prescription pain medicines, heart and blood pressure medicines, drugs used for treatment of cancer, and some antidepressants.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of fatigue include:

- Lack of energy.
- Lack of drive (motivation).
- Drowsiness.
- Feeling of indifference to the surroundings.

DIAGNOSIS

The details of how you feel help guide your caregiver in finding out what is causing the fatigue. You will be asked about your present and past health condition. It is important to review all medicines that you take, including prescription and non-prescription items. A thorough exam will be done. You will be questioned about your feelings, habits, and normal lifestyle. Your caregiver may suggest blood tests, urine tests, or other tests to look for common medical causes of fatigue.

TREATMENT

Fatigue is treated by correcting the underlying cause. For example, if you have continuous pain or depression, treating these causes will improve how you feel. Similarly, adjusting the dose of certain medicines will help in reducing fatigue.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Try to get the required amount of good sleep every night.
- Eat a healthy and nutritious diet, and drink enough water throughout the day.

- Practice ways of relaxing (including yoga or meditation).
- Exercise regularly.
- Make plans to change situations that cause stress. Act on those plans so that stresses decrease over time. Keep your work and personal routine reasonable.
- Avoid street drugs and minimize use of alcohol.
- Start taking a daily multivitamin after consulting your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have persistent tiredness, which cannot be accounted for.
- You have fever.
- You have unintentional weight loss.
- You have headaches.
- You have disturbed sleep throughout the night.
- You are feeling sad.
- You have constipation.
- You have dry skin.
- You have gained weight.
- You are taking any new or different medicines that you suspect are causing fatigue.
- You are unable to sleep at night.
- You develop any unusual swelling of your legs or other parts of your body.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are feeling confused.
- Your vision is blurred.
- You feel faint or pass out.
- You develop severe headache.
- You develop severe abdominal, pelvic, or back pain.
- You develop chest pain, shortness of breath, or an irregular or fast heartbeat.
- You are unable to pass a normal amount of urine.
- You develop abnormal bleeding such as bleeding from the rectum or you vomit blood.
- You have thoughts about harming yourself or committing suicide.
- You are worried that you might harm someone else.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

REFERENCES

- National Library of Medicine
  http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003088.htm
- National Cancer Institute
  http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/supportivecare/fatigue/Patient

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