

GMHC'S Nutrition & Wellness Program

FATIGUE

WHAT IS FATIGUE?

Fatigue is a feeling of exhaustion and chronic tiredness that does not go away when you rest.

Fatigue can have many different causes. It may also be a warning sign of other problems. It's important to deal with symptoms of fatigue early and to find out what's causing them.

Taking care of yourself by managing stress, seeing your doctor regularly, eating a healthy diet, drinking enough water, being physically active and managing fatigue can significantly improve your quality of life!

WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE?

While fatigue may be caused by physical and medical problems like infection or anemia, it can also be caused by emotional or psychological stress. Some common causes of fatigue include:

Infections

Your body needs a lot of energy to fight HIV infections. Opportunistic infections such as pneumonia, Kaposi's sarcoma or other infections can be very draining. Parasites in the digestive tract, the flu, bronchitis, or allergies can also cause fatigue.

Hormone levels

Low levels of testosterone, especially in men can cause fatigue and reduce your sex drive. Low testosterone levels are common with HIV so it's a good idea to talk to your doctor about having your levels checked. A simple blood test is all it takes.

Anemia

Anemia usually refers to low levels of red blood cells and is very common in HIV. Without enough blood cells to give your body the oxygen it needs, people can feel very tired. It may be caused by some medications, infection or nutritional deficiencies (like a lack of vitamin B-12, folate and/or iron). There are different treatments for different types of anemia. Talk to your doctor or nutritionist about the treatment that may be right for you.

Medications

Indinavir (Crixivan), AZT (Retrovir), Rebetrol, gancyclovir (Cytovene), Bactrim, Septra and D4T may cause anemia and result in fatigue.

Poor Nutrition

To keep your energy levels up, your body needs to have enough nutrients! People with HIV may have higher needs for calories and some nutrients so it's important that you make sure you're eating well. Your nutritional status can be affected not only by what you eat, but also by how well your body absorbs nutrients. Nutrient deficiencies are common with HIV and can get worse if you are having diarrhea.

FIGHTING FATIGUE WITH DIET

There are a lot of easy ways you can help fight fatigue. Taking care of yourself and making sure that your diet is meeting your needs is an important first step.

See the back of this sheet for some practical dietary suggestions.

Prepare food in advance. Make it easy for yourself to get the healthy foods you need by keeping these foods around the house and having them ready to go. Try cooking in big batches when you're up to it. Freeze individual servings that you can defrost and eat when you're feeling tired.

Load up on fruits and vegetables. These are packed with vitamins and minerals that you need to keep your immune system strong and energy levels high. Keep fruits you like on hand for easy snacks and try to eat at least one serving of veggies with lunch and dinner. This will also provide fluid which may help with fatigue.

Eat small frequent meals throughout the day. This may help boost your food intake and energy levels. It may also help prevent your blood sugar from falling too low.

Accept help when offered. If someone offers to cook for you, let them. If you feel up to it, come in to GMHC for lunch. Take advantage of opportunities to share and enjoy meals with others. Find out about community food programs like God's Love We Deliver.

Drink at least 8 cups of fluid per day. If you aren't getting enough water, you may get dehydrated which can make you feel drowsy.

Talk to you doctor or nutritionist about ways to fight fatigue and boost your appetite.

Order in or even take breakfast in bed if you're up for it. Treat yourself, if it will help you get what you need.

Try whole grains. Whole wheat breads, rice, oats, and whole grains provide energy that lasts. The sugars in whole grains enter your blood stream more slowly than those in refined white flour and white sugar. Whole grains are also rich in vitamins and minerals.

Limit coffee, tea, alcohol and cigarettes. These may give you a quick energy rush but they often wear you out and make you more tired in the long run.

WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?

Food is ultimately the best (and cheapest) source of good quality vitamins and minerals. However, with HIV your nutritional needs may be increased and there are some supplements that might help, especially if you're already deficient in some nutrients.

Ask your health care professional about:

A Daily Multivitamin. This is a good idea for anyone with HIV.

B-Complex: This is a mixture of B vitamins that works with the body's energy pathways. It may help increase energy, especially if you're already deficient in B vitamins.

L-Carnitine: This may increase energy levels by transporting fat into cells for energy.

Coenzyme Q-10: Without an adequate amount of Coenzyme Q 10, the body will have fewer resources with which to fight fatigue.

OTHER WAYS TO REDUCE FATIGUE AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE:

Get enough sleep. Sometimes just getting a few extra hours of quality sleep can help a lot.

Ask for help, if you need it.

Try complementary therapies offered for free at GMHC like massage, yoga, reiki or acupuncture.

Rest or take naps throughout the day when you feel tired. However, avoid napping within 6 hours of bedtime so you will not stay up all night.