

## Fatigue fighting tips

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness, or lack of energy that does not go away when you rest. People may feel fatigued – in body or mind (physical or psychological fatigue).

Most of the time, fatigue can be traced to one or more of your habits or routines. Fatigue can be a normal and important response to physical exertion, poor eating habits, emotional stress, boredom, or lack of sleep. In some cases, however, fatigue is a symptom of an underlying medical problem that requires medical treatment. When fatigue is not relieved by enough sleep, good nutrition, or a low-stress environment, it should be evaluated by your doctor.

### Tips to help boost energy levels and fight fatigue

Chances are you know what's causing your fatigue. And with a few simple lifestyle changes, it's likely that you have the power to put the vitality back in your life. Consider these different ways you can boost your energy levels.

### Dietary suggestions

Have a good look at your diet – it's very important if you want more energy in your daily life. Suggestions include:

- **Drink plenty of water** – a dehydrated body functions less efficiently.
- **Be careful with caffeine** – one or two caffeinated drinks (like coffee, tea or cola) per day boosts energy and mental alertness. However, heavy caffeine users (more than six drinks per day) are prone to anxiety, irritability and reduced performance.
- **Eat breakfast** – food boosts your metabolism and gives the body energy to burn. The brain relies on glucose for fuel, so choose carbohydrate-rich breakfast foods such as cereals or wholegrain bread.
- **Don't skip meals** – going without food for too long allows blood sugar levels to dip. Try to eat regularly to maintain your energy levels throughout the day.
- **Don't crash diet** – low kilojoule diets, or diets that severely restrict carbohydrates, don't contain enough energy for your body's needs. The reduced food variety of the typical crash diet also deprives the body of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and trace elements.
- **Eat a healthy diet** – increase the amount of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods, low fat dairy products and lean meats in your diet. Reduce the amount of high fat, high sugar and high salt foods.
- **Don't overeat** – large meals can drain your energy. Instead of eating three big meals per day, try eating six mini-meals to spread your kilojoule intake more evenly. This will result in more constant blood sugar and insulin levels. You'll also find it easier to lose excess body fat if you eat this way.
- **Eat iron rich foods** – women, in particular, are prone to iron-deficiency (anaemia). Make sure your diet includes iron rich foods such as lean red meat.

### Sleep suggestions

A common cause of fatigue is not enough sleep, or poor quality sleep. Suggestions include:

- **Get enough sleep** – adults need about eight hours sleep per night. Make the necessary changes to ensure you get a better night's sleep.
- **Limit caffeine** – too much caffeine, particularly in the evening, can cause insomnia. Limit caffeinated drinks to five or less per day, and avoid these types of drinks after dinner.
- **Learn how to relax** – a common cause of insomnia is fretting about problems while lying in bed. Experiment with different relaxation techniques until you find one or two that work for you; for example, you could think of a restful scene, focus on your breathing, or silently repeat a mantra or phrase.
- **Avoid sleeping pills** – sleeping pills are not a long term solution because they don't address the causes of insomnia.

### Lifestyle suggestions

Suggestions include:

- **Don't smoke** – cigarette smoke contains many harmful substances. There are many reasons why smokers typically have lower energy levels than non-smokers. For example, for the body to make energy it needs to combine glucose with oxygen, but the carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen available in the blood.
- **Increase physical activity** – physical activity boosts energy levels, while a sedentary lifestyle is a known cause of fatigue. Physical activity has many good effects on the body and mind. A good bout of exercise also helps you sleep better at night.
- **Limit the time you sit down** – reduce sedentary behaviours such as watching television and using computers.
- **Seek advice** – if you haven't exercised in a long time, are obese, aged over 40 years or have a chronic medical condition, always seek your doctor's advice and encouragement regarding the small steps you can take toward a more active lifestyle.
- **Seek treatment for substance abuse** – excessive alcohol consumption or recreational drug use contributes to fatigue, and is unhealthy and potentially dangerous.
- **Workplace issues** – demanding jobs, conflicts at work and burnout are common causes of fatigue. Take steps to address your work problems. A good place to start is to talk with your human resources officer.

### Psychological issues

Studies suggest that between 50 and 80 per cent of fatigue cases are mainly due to psychological factors. Suggestions include:

- **Assess your lifestyle** – for example, are you putting yourself under unnecessary stress? Are there ongoing problems in your life that may be causing prolonged anxiety or depression? It may help to seek professional counselling to work out family, career or personal issues.
- **Relaxation training** – constant anxiety drains the body of energy and can lead to burnout. Strategies include learning relaxation techniques, such as meditation or yoga, to help 'switch off' the adrenaline and allow the body and mind to recover.
- **Learn to do nothing** – one of the drawbacks of modern life is the urge to drive ourselves to bigger and better heights. A hectic lifestyle is exhausting. Try to carve out a few more hours in your week to simply relax and hang out. If you can't find a few more hours, it may be time to rethink your priorities and commitments.
- **Have more fun** – maybe you're so preoccupied with commitments and pressures that you don't give yourself enough time for fun. Laughter is one of the best energy boosters around.

### Coping with the mid-afternoon energy slump

Most people feel drowsy after lunch. This mid-afternoon drop in energy levels is linked to the brain's circadian rhythm and is 'hard wired' into the human body. Prevention may be impossible, but there are ways to reduce the severity of the slump, including:

- Incorporate as many of the above fatigue fighting suggestions as you can into your lifestyle. A fit, healthy and well-rested body is less prone to severe drowsiness in the afternoon.
- Eat a combination of protein and carbohydrates for lunch, for example a tuna sandwich. Carbohydrates provide glucose for energy.
- More good reasons to eat protein for lunch – the amino acid tyrosine allows the brain to synthesise the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine, which help keep your mind attentive and alert.
- Get moving. A brisk walk or even 10 minutes of stretching at your desk improves blood flow and boosts energy.

### Where to get help

- Your doctor

### Things to remember

- Always see your doctor to make sure that your fatigue isn't caused by an underlying medical problem.
- Activity and nutrition are an important part of putting more energy into your daily life.

- Studies suggest that between 50 and 80 per cent of fatigue cases are mainly due to psychological factors.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Kinect Australia (inc VICFIT in Victoria)

This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. The information provided was accurate at the time of publication and is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Copyright** © 1999/2010 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.