

Multiple Sclerosis

Practically everyone who has multiple sclerosis (MS) also has fatigue. According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), approximately 80% of those diagnosed with the condition will experience fatigue at some point during the course of the disease. Fatigue from MS can wreak havoc on your life for many reasons, both at work and at home, and may limit the types of activities you choose.

Researchers have started to identify distinct characteristics associated with MS that make it quite different from general tiredness:

Onset: Begins suddenly

Frequency: Often occurs every day

Time of Day: Can occur in the morning, despite having slept the night before

Progression: Commonly worsens throughout the day

Heat sensitive: Heat and humidity may aggravate it

Severity: Tends to be more severe than other types of fatigue

Effect of activities: More likely than regular fatigue to disrupt ability to perform everyday tasks

Tip 1: Exercise Often

Regular physical activity can help fight fatigue related to MS. Having a consistent exercise program can help with endurance, balance, weight loss, and general well-being which is important for people living with MS. While exercise helps some people with MS, there are others with the condition who will not experience the same benefit. Talk to your doctor before starting any kind of fitness program and remember the goal of exercise is to give you more energy.

Tip 2: Conserve Energy

Conserving one's energy is a key principle for those with MS. What is your best time of day to get things done—the time when you feel the most energetic? If you notice you feel less fatigue in the morning, take advantage of this extra energy to take care of tasks like shopping and cleaning. Take a nap to recharge and conserve your energy.

Tip 3: Review Medications

While some medications, including aspirin, can help with fatigue management, it is recommended to avoid using medicine to treat fatigue. As an MS patient, you may already be taking other medications, and it is best to limit the number of drugs that you take whenever possible. If you are taking medicines for other symptoms, make sure to check their side effects to ensure they are not adding to your fatigue. Talk with your doctor about each medicine that you take and work together to determine whether those that cause fatigue can be eliminated.

Tip 4: Stay Cool

MS patients may be especially sensitive to heat. As a result, they may experience more fatigue when they are in a warmer environment or become overheated. Be sure to use air conditioning as needed, take a cool shower, drink icy beverages, and wear lightweight clothing.

Tip 5: Try Therapy

If changing your lifestyle does not give you the energy boost that is needed, you may want to try occupational or physical therapy. In occupational therapy, a trained specialist will help you to simplify activities in your work or home environments. In physical therapy, a trained professional helps you more effectively perform daily physical tasks, for example, using techniques or devices that may help you to conserve energy while walking.

Tip 6: Regulate Your Sleep

Sleep problems are often behind the fatigue that people with MS experience. Whether you have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or getting the amount and type of sleep you need to awaken feeling refreshed, the result is the same—you will feel tired.

Tip 7: Practice Good Clean Living

Certain behaviors may appear to help with fatigue, however, in the end, they may cause more problems than they solve. While drinking a hot beverage may sound like a good way to wind down, if your drink contains caffeine, you may be prevented from falling to sleep which can lead to fatigue the next day. Review your behaviors that may be contributing to poor sleep habits and fatigue and take measures to stop them.

Crockett Resource Center for Independent Living (CRCIL) hosts a bi-monthly support group for people with MS. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 18th at 5:00 p.m. CRCIL is located at 1020 Loop 304 East, Crockett, Texas, 936-544-2811.