

Fatigue and Inflammatory Arthritis

What Is Fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of extreme tiredness and low energy. It is a very common symptom of inflammatory arthritis, just like joint pain and stiffness. Fatigue can make doing the smallest task too much.

What can cause Fatigue?

- **Inflammation:**
High levels of inflammation in your body cause fatigue and flu-like symptoms.
- **Anaemia:**
This is when you do not have enough healthy red blood cells. People with RA often have anaemia
- **Pain:**
Pain wears you down physically and mentally.
- **Sleep changes:**
Too little sleep due to pain and worry can cause fatigue. Long naps and too much sleep can also cause fatigue.
- **Weak muscles:**
People become less active and weaker due to pain. Weak muscles have to work harder to do the same activity as strong muscles. This means you get tired more easily.



- **Overdoing things:**
You might want to get as many things done in your day as before, even when it takes longer. This can lead to “overdoing things” - causing pain and exhaustion for days afterwards.
- **Other medical conditions:**
For example, diabetes, thyroid conditions, heart conditions.
- **Drugs:**
Some medications used to treat arthritis and pain cause drowsiness.
- **Stress:**
Stress over time can result in hormone imbalance; this affects energy levels.

What are the top causes of fatigue for you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How Can I Manage My Fatigue?

Talk to your team: Tell your arthritis doctor (rheumatologist) or nurse about your fatigue. Often good control of your disease improves fatigue. You might also benefit from advice about changing medication types or timing, for example, use of pain medication at night.

Increase your physical activity: Think about how you can move more and sit less in your day. As your muscles get stronger, activities will become easier.

Improve your nutrition: Look at the Canada Food Guide, or The Arthritis Society's booklet on Nutrition & Arthritis for information on a healthy and balanced diet. You can also speak to a dietitian weekdays by phoning HealthLink BC 8-1-1.

Improve your sleep: If you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, talk to your doctor and/or arthritis therapist. There are medication and non-medication methods to improve sleep.

Problem Solving, Prioritising, Planning, and Pacing: Learn how to organise your time and use your energy wisely. Try not to focus on things you *have* to do. Plan space for things you enjoy.

Managing stress, mood and anxiety: Worry about illness, relationships, finances, or job demands can be draining. Try talking to family and friends, or a support group. Relaxation techniques such as meditation and deep breathing can help. Learn to prioritise your health needs and say no sometimes, so you have time for yourself!

If you feel very down and have no interest in daily activities, talk to your doctor. Counselling and/or a short course of medication may help with your mood.

Talk to your arthritis therapists about support groups or telephone counselling that may be available.

Take Action

Have a look back and choose 1-2 ideas that you think you would like to try in the next 2 weeks:

1. _____
2. _____

Fatigue is a challenge, but your arthritis therapist is there to help. Share your ideas from above and they can help you make a plan that works.

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This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.