

Parkinson's and fatigue

Fatigue affects many people with Parkinson's. However, there are a number of ways to manage or reduce fatigue.

Many people with Parkinson's experience fatigue and it can have a major impact on your well-being. However there is a lot you can do to manage fatigue so that it doesn't cause you so many problems. It's helpful to find out why you feel low on energy or worn out and it pays to remember that there may be more than one cause. Your fatigue may be a symptom of another, co-existing condition. With Parkinson's your energy levels tend to fluctuate somewhat anyway, especially as the condition progresses. Our factsheet on Parkinson's and sleep problems may be of interest to you too, as may our factsheet on Parkinson's and depression.

WHAT IS FATIGUE?

Fatigue can be described as an overwhelming sense of tiredness, a lack of energy and a feeling of exhaustion. Fatigue can be a physical, emotional or mental feeling or experience, or a combination of these.

It's important not to confuse fatigue with sleepiness. Sleepiness tends to be a short term phenomenon, but fatigue is over the medium or longer term.

Akinesia, or trouble initiating movement, often feels like fatigue. A person with akinesia must move slowly and will find it hard to finish a task in what is considered a usual amount of time. Everyday tasks such as getting dressed may take a lot of effort.

WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE?

Although there is no formal consensus among health professionals, fatigue is attributed to a number of possible causes.

Having Parkinson's means that what was automatic movement may now require conscious effort, which can be very tiring. Parkinson's drugs which help with slow movement may be at least part of the solution to this problem.

Depression and low mood can cause or worsen fatigue, and anti-depressants and/or therapy and life style changes may help. These include getting more sleep, exercising, improving your diet and other recommended activities to manage depression.

Problems related to sleep — whether insufficient sleep, insomnia, disturbed or broken sleep — may contribute to fatigue.

Some experts believe fatigue may have its own unique cause. They say there is a distinct process or pathology in the central nervous system that causes fatigue.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT FATIGUE?

Delegate tasks. Let your carer, family and friends help you.

Don't take on too much. It pays to write 'to do' lists and schedule things if you want to be organised, so that you can see whether you are setting realistic targets.

Have a regular bed time and stick to it. Many people find having a bedtime routine helps, like bathing just before bed and maybe taking a good book to bed. Keeping the room you sleep in uncluttered, warm or cool depending on the weather, and a pleasant relaxing place to be in, is vitally important. Using low lighting is preferable,

because suddenly turning on bright lights can be disruptive and impairs your natural production of melatonin, a chemical that regulates your sleep patterns. Staying away from screens is particularly vital when you are trying to sleep.

Follow a balanced diet that has plenty of protein and, if you eat pasta and other carb-loaded food, insist on low GI carbohydrates that do not cause your blood glucose levels to go too high. Don't eat things high in sugar that can contribute to ups and downs in your mood. Eating whole foods and avoiding processed food usually helps. Avoid coffee, alcohol and tobacco, especially close to bed time.

Get fresh air, whether it's taking the dog for a walk or visiting the local library, catching up with friends or whatever else you want to do.

Exercise regularly. If your exercise involves going to a gym or outside it pays to have a contingency plan for wet days. Doing some exercises in the warmth of your home may be preferable. If you attend exercise classes they often have a social dimension and you and the other people there encourage one another. This can be good for your mood and consequently your energy levels. Try to co-ordinate periods of activity with times when your medication is working at its most effective.

If you are experiencing fatigue, discuss it with your health professional. Get the support and information you need so that you can make the best decisions for yourself. Of course your partner, carer and/or your family may be able to help you. Sometimes just another perspective, or another head on the job, helps.



If your fatigue is related to movement, your doctor may recommend medication changes that will help.

Although it may not seem intuitive to many people, meditation and relaxation exercises may ease your feelings of fatigue.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is an effective psychological therapy used by professionals and national health systems as a treatment for depression and many other disorders. CBT teaches people how to recognise and change patterns of thought and behaviour to solve their problems and has proven very effective for many health issues. CBT can be very helpful for people that feel they cannot control behavioural patterns (such as always going to bed too late). You may want to talk with your Parkinson's Community Educator about how to access CBT. If you or your carer or family member do attend CBT sessions, be sure to tell the psychotherapist that you have Parkinson's and what you are thinking when you feel tired.

Apathy is a problem in its own right. This is when you lose interest in things you had previously felt passionate about. It can be mistaken for depression, but is actually a separate condition. Tell your GP or Parkinson's Community Educator if you are feeling this level of disinterest in life.

Just because you have Parkinson's you don't have to shut down your social life. We humans are generally social creatures and there is an energy that comes from conversation and social activities that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Limit your time in front of screens, whether they are your phone, television, laptop, PC or Tablet.

If your sleep is of poor quality, 30 to 40 minute naps may help. Naps of this length, professionals recognise, are ideal. However, it's important you do not nap too close to bedtime or you may find yourself up half the night. A sleep in the middle of the day, particularly after a meal, is a good idea.

Let your fingers do the walking when it comes to shopping. Ring before you go or visit the business's website first to avoid unnecessary trips. You may consider paying a little extra for your grocery shopping to be delivered to your home, at least some weeks, if you can afford this.

If you are still working make sure you know your rights at work in terms of breaks so that you are not getting unnecessarily tired. Use the breaks you are entitled to—you will be more productive as well as the benefits you will accrue personally.

If you would like information about Parkinson's to pass on to a health professional or if you would like to know more about what options you have regarding pain you or someone you care for is living with, please contact your Parkinson's Community Educator or phone **0800 473 4636**.

This fact sheet was last updated in September 2016.

Parkinson's Awareness Week 2016

CONNECTING PEOPLE, CHANGING LIVES

Parkinson's Awareness Week this year (1 to 7 November) will reinforce the ongoing theme of Parkinson's New Zealand: Connecting people, changing lives.

We connect people in many different ways. These include connecting people to the right support and exercise groups, helping our donors and funders connect with a great charity that creates a real impact and promoting connections between exercise and better health for people living with Parkinson's.

"Perhaps our most vital role as an organisation is connecting people with Parkinson's and their carers with others who can help them and connecting them to services that can enhance their lives," says Parkinson's New Zealand Chief Executive, Deirdre O'Sullivan.

One of the key highlights Parkinson's Awareness Week is our partnership with Val Morgan Cinema Network, who last year gave us over \$140,000 of donated screen time on over 360 cinema screens for our campaign commercial.

If you would like to keep up with what we are doing this year, please visit www.parkinsons.org.nz, like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/parkinsonsnz or follow us on Twitter [@parkinsonsnz](https://twitter.com/parkinsonsnz).

Volunteers are vital for all our branches and divisions during our Awareness Week and throughout the year. If you or members of your family can help please contact your local branch or division. All branch and division contact details are on our website or email us at info@parkinsons.org.nz or call 0800 473 4636 for more information.

**GET GOING
FOR PARKINSON'S**



If you or someone you know would like to raise funds for Parkinson's New Zealand, please contact us on 04 472 2796 or 0800 473 4636 or getgoing@parkinsons.org.nz. We have an information pack on how to get started, fundraising ideas, instructions for setting up a givealittle page and more.