



The Wellness Family

Dr. Cohn Keeps You Informed

UNDERSTANDING FATIGUE

If you've had a busy day or overdid it exercising then you'll certainly understand being weary or tired. Sometimes too much caffeine in the morning and a heavy lunch can cause an afternoon slump, as most can attest. These are all pretty common as we experience different levels of drowsiness, but fatigue is a completely different matter.

Defining Fatigue

The typical description of fatigue would be a lack of energy or motivation; this can be either physical or mental or both. Different from drowsiness, which typically means a need to sleep, fatigue is often described using words like lethargic or exhausted.

Fatigue is generally considered an unrelenting exhaustion that lasts longer and is more profound than just being sleepy. Additionally, it is typically unable to be relieved by rest. It is considered a nearly constant state of weariness that may develop over time and reduce energy, motivation and concentration. A serious level of fatigue will impact emotional and psychological well-being.

Many times fatigue can be traced to one or more habits or routines but is also commonly related to depression.

According to the third edition of the Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine, "Fatigue has three main clusters of symptoms: becoming easily tired and reduced ability to maintain performance; generalized weakness; and mental fatigue, including decreased ability to concentrate and memory loss."

Common Causes of Fatigue

Generally speaking, fatigue is typically a symptom and not a disease in and of itself. It is a very common complaint with a gradual onset. Nearly everyone at one point or another is overworked or overtired and such instances of temporary fatigue will usually have a cause that can be identified and remedied.

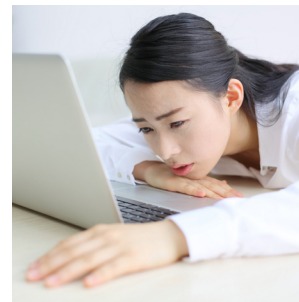
Some common causes of fatigue are from lifestyle factors such as the use of alcohol or drugs, an excess or lack of physical activity, jet lag, a lack of good sleep, medications such as antihistamines or cold/cough medicines, and unhealthy eating habits.

Afternoon Fatigue

Beyond just being sleepy after eating a big meal, many times afternoon fatigue will feel like a battle to even stay awake, much less think or actually accomplish anything. An afternoon slump is pretty common but afternoon fatigue can be difficult to overcome.

The body can burn two types of fuel, carbohydrates or fat. Our ancestors used fat as a primary fuel source but today's Western diet leans more heavily on carbohydrates (sugar). Because of this fact, afternoon fatigue may be related to post-lunch hypoglycemia.

The obvious "cure" for afternoon fatigue is to train the body to burn fat instead of sugar, which should eliminate such drops in energy level. The easiest way to accomplish this is to stop taking in carbohydrates with lunch. Make sure every lunch is rich in proteins and vegetables.



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Beyond just avoiding afternoon fatigue, the benefits to such a dietary choice include but are not limited to:

- Having accessible energy on hand, as the body effectively burns stored fat for energy
- Improved insulin sensitivity
- Burning dietary fat for energy effectively leading to less fat being stored
- Being able to readily depend upon fat for energy during exertion

Serious Causes of Fatigue

Typically, while not considered a disease itself, fatigue has been defined as a common symptom to some serious illnesses. Those who have been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, depression, diabetes (both type 1 and type 2), fibromyalgia, mononucleosis, multiple sclerosis and any type of cancer (lymphoma, bone cancer, etc.) will typically, at one time or another, experience some stage of fatigue.

With some of these illnesses the fatigue can become completely debilitating. It will become almost impossible to complete even the most common or mundane tasks due to a total lack of energy, focus or motivation.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

It was in 1988 that the Centers for Disease Control finally recognized Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, or as it's come

to be known, Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), as an illness. Finally, most doctors have now abandoned their view that chronic fatigue syndrome was just something “in your head” and it’s no longer viewed as a psychological disorder.

While extreme fatigue is the most common symptom of CFIDS, other symptoms include: muscle and joint aches and pains; chronic headaches; sore throat, swollen glands and periodic fevers and chills; numbness and tingling of the extremities; cognitive dysfunction; and insomnia.

While researchers in the past almost 30 years have claimed they’ve determined the cause of CFIDS, they’ve reached no agreement. Much of the research in the past 10 to 20 years suggests an infectious agent as the cause, primarily various viruses, but nobody can determine which one. As a result, Dr. Mercola posits the question: is it a virus causing chronic fatigue syndrome or is chronic fatigue syndrome itself making people more susceptible to infections? It’s anyone’s guess.

Thyroid-Related Fatigue

Clearly there are many causes of fatigue so it’s important to try to recognize the cause before making assumptions. Thyroid-related fatigue begins to appear when a certain energy level can’t be maintained, especially when comparing it to past levels of fitness or ability. If thyroid foundation is weak, sustaining energy output is difficult.

Some of the key symptoms of thyroid fatigue will include not having the energy to exercise, falling asleep as soon as sitting down when there is nothing else to be done, or a heavy or tired head, especially in the afternoon (the head is a very sensitive indicator of thyroid hormone status).

If going to bed and getting a good night’s sleep resolves the fatigue, and there is sufficient energy throughout the day for all of the day’s demands, then thyroid-related fatigue is probably not an issue.

Adrenal Fatigue

The adrenal glands are an absolutely vital part of the human body with one of the most important functions: managing stress from every possible source. When the adrenal glands

are fatigued (a condition known as adrenal fatigue or adrenal exhaustion), the entire body feels it and suffers from extreme exhaustion as well.

As part of the endocrine system, the adrenal glands produce many hormones (including adrenaline and cortisol) that help to manage stress. In its simplest terms these hormones will be released to help the body prepare for a fight or flight response whether or not being faced with a fight or flight scenario. If facing stress at work, at home or in any other situation, the hormones will be released to prepare the body for a physical response and if a physical response isn’t needed then those hormones will remain in the body un-needed and un-used. Ironically, while these glands are there to help the body cope with stress, too much of it is actually what causes their function to break down. When the glands are worn out the resultant adrenal fatigue can cause fatigue.

How to Combat Fatigue

Since the actual cause of fatigue is still being debated, and it tends to be a symptom of another illness rather than its own definable disease, it’s safe to say that fighting fatigue can begin with a visit to your Family Wellness Chiropractor who addresses the role the nervous system plays in how the body functions.

The nervous system controls all of the body’s other systems, this includes the immune system and the endocrine system, two of the bodily systems mentioned. When the central nervous system is functioning properly then the other systems in the body operate at their best as well. This alone may help resolve fatigue.

Other solutions would include making some healthy dietary changes. Certain complex carbohydrates will break down as sugar in the digestive system and if fatigue is a result of blood sugar issues or gut flora imbalances, then dietary changes may help. Discuss this further with your Family Wellness Chiropractor.

Finally, consider increased physical activity to increase overall stamina and energy. Should insomnia be a side effect of the fatigue being experienced then some routine and regular physical activity may resolve this as well.



*Dear Patient,
Dr. Cohn is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family’s overall health and wellness.*

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