

# Managing Fatigue With Parkinson's



Do you or a loved one with Parkinson's disease (PD) feel physically or mentally exhausted? This could be fatigue — a feeling of deep tiredness that has no apparent explanation, and does not improve with rest. About half of people with Parkinson's disease report that fatigue is a major problem, and a third say it is their single most disabling symptom.

Fatigue is common early in the course of PD, but it can occur at any point and can happen whether movement symptoms are mild or severe. It is sometimes confused with other symptoms that can make a person sleepy or tired, like sleep disturbances or pain. Fatigue also is a symptom of depression, but a person can be fatigued without being depressed. Stress can make fatigue worse.

No specific mechanism has been shown to cause fatigue in PD. It may be that motor symptoms like tremor and stiffness contribute to making muscles tired. But fatigue has other causes too. It's

important to identify and treat illnesses or medications not related to PD that cause fatigue.

The extreme exhaustion that comes with fatigue can lead people to reduce their hours at work or retire, or avoid social activities. Understanding fatigue as a symptom of PD and finding ways to cope with it are essential to maintaining a good quality of life.

## Symptoms

- Fatigue is different from sleepiness. A person who is fatigued feels exhausted but does not necessarily feel like sleeping.
- Physical fatigue: feeling deeply tired or weary; may worsen with "off" fluctuations.
- Mental fatigue: mental tiredness that makes it difficult to concentrate.

## Therapies

- Few therapies have been tested for fatigue in PD, and none have been proven effective against fatigue on its own. Therapies for PD motor symptoms do not seem to help fatigue.
- When fatigue is intertwined with other symptoms, treating those symptoms may help people feel more energetic; for example, treating sleep disturbances can help a person sleep soundly through the night, and treating depression may help.
- Some therapies for motor symptoms may contribute to fatigue or make you sleepy. Adjusting doses of these medications may help solve the problem.
- Talk to your doctor about medications you take that are not for PD — these also may contribute to fatigue.
- Although little research has been done to evaluate stimulants like amphetamine salts, your physician may recommend trying a low dose.

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- With your doctor, identify and treat any medical causes of fatigue besides PD, such as anemia.
- Talk with your doctor before taking any vitamins or supplements. These may interact with medications for PD or other disorders.
- In addition to your neurological appointments, have regular check-ups with your primary care doctor. Ask him or her to test for nutritional deficiencies such as vitamin B, potassium and more.

### Tips for Coping with Fatigue

- Eat well.
- Stay hydrated.
- Exercise: walk, do tai chi, dance, cycle, swim, do yoga or chair yoga — whatever you enjoy. Fatigue may make it hard to start exercising, but many people say it makes them feel more energetic afterward. If you find it difficult to get going, consider exercising with another person or a group.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule. If you have difficulty sleeping because of tremor or stiffness, trouble rolling over, or needing to use the bathroom, talk to your doctor about these issues.
- Take a short nap (10-30 minutes) after lunch. But avoid frequent naps throughout the day, or napping after 3:00 PM.
- Stay socially connected.
- Pace yourself: plan your day so that you are active at times when you feel most energetic and have a chance to rest when you need to.
- Do something fun: visit with an upbeat friend, or pursue a hobby.
- At work, take regular short breaks.

### Factors Contributing to Fatigue

- Lack of exercise or sedentary lifestyle.
- Increased effort required due to slowness, muscle stiffness, or tremor.
- Greater concentration to perform tasks that are no longer “automatic”.

- Sleep disturbances resulting from muscle cramping, “restless legs”, or difficulty turning in bed.
- Changes in mood or feelings of depression may decrease energy levels.
- Fluctuations in mobility related to level of PD medications.

### Useful Steps to Maximize Energy and Endurance

- Seek to identify and minimize/eliminate the major sources of stress and fatigue in your daily routine.
- Avoid over-scheduling... learn to say no to added responsibilities or tasks you don't enjoy.
- Perform regular exercise – both physical and mental – to build endurance and stamina.
- Make sure you schedule adequate time for rest and sleep into your daily routine ...Plan tasks and gather supplies to save unnecessary steps.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Delegate or hire help for tasks you find particularly stressful or tiring.
- Take advantage of convenience products, foods and gadgets.
- Recognize your limits to avoid over-exertion.
- Plan highest levels of activity at times you are well rested and medications are working well.

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*Content for this article was derived from “Fatigue,” and “Fighting Fatigue” on PDF.com*

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