



What is fatigue?

Fatigue is when your body is physically or mentally exhausted and can no longer function as safely and effectively as it would normally. Sometimes fatigue is described as being tired, however it's different to just feeling drowsy or sleepy – it's a feeling of constant tiredness that impacts on your body's ability to perform normally. Usually this is caused by long periods of physical or mental exertion with little or no downtime for your body to rest and recover.

Fatigue can impact your judgment and reduce your level of alertness which can increase your risk of incidents and accidents.

A few facts about fatigue

Fatigue is a known risk factor in motor vehicle and workplace accidents

Being awake for 17 hours has the equivalent effect on performance of a blood alcohol level of 0.05. Being awake for 20 hours has the equivalent effect on performance of a blood alcohol level of 0.1

Feeling exhausted is so common in some countries that it even has its own acronym – TATT – which stands for 'tired all the time'

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can be triggered by a wide range of issues either on their own or working in combination.

MEDICAL – thyroid disorder, heart disease or diabetes as well as some medications or treatments may lead to fatigue. If you experience prolonged fatigue it is important to consult with your doctor.

LIFESTYLE-RELATED – poor sleep (too much or too little), alcohol and drug use, insufficient exercise and poor nutrition.

WORK-RELATED – shift work or changing shifts, working alone, jobs requiring long periods of fixed concentration, poor lighting or temperature extremes, workplace conflict, constant change, high workload, being unemployed and threats to job security.

PSYCHOLOGICAL – depression, anxiety, stress, bereavement, relationship breakdown and grief.

Signs and symptoms

Fatigue can cause a wide range of physical, mental and emotional symptoms including:

- Dizziness, headaches or frequent mood changes
- Aching/sore muscles, or muscle weakness
- Slowed reflexes and responses
- Difficulty concentrating or hallucinations
- Short-term memory problems (confusion or forgetfulness)
- Reduced immunity
- Impaired judgement and ability to make decisions
- Chronic tiredness
- Reduced or interrupted, poor quality sleep



Help yourself

Fatigue is a symptom and not a condition itself. To reduce or resolve your fatigue you need to understand the underlying reasons in order to achieve improvement. You can assist this process with some simple lifestyle changes.

- 1 DIET** – avoid foods high in sugar, saturated fats and excess carbohydrates. These make your blood sugar levels spike and plummet quickly which make you feel tired. Instead opt for fresh fruits, vegetables, grains and proteins that will keep your energy levels up without the sugar crash.
- 2 SMALLER MEALS** – keep your energy levels up during the day by eating six small meals throughout the day rather than three large meals.
- 3 TRY A SUPPLEMENT** – iron deficiency can be a cause of tiredness. Try a multi-vitamin with iron once a day to ensure you are getting enough essential vitamins and minerals in your diet.
- 4 EXERCISE** – your body produces endorphins through regular exercise. Endorphins are the ‘feel good hormone’ which can help to elevate your mood and energy levels.
- 5 SLEEP HYGIENE** – remove the TV and electronic devices from your bedroom so it’s a place for relaxation and sleep.
- 6 REDUCE CAFFEINE INTAKE** – a cup of hot coffee in the morning can help to wake you up and get energised for the day, but caffeine is a stimulant and can impact on the quality of your sleep. Don’t forget that caffeine is also found in most teas, energy drinks, and soft drinks – limit your consumption of these in the afternoon or at night. Why not try a naturally caffeine-free herbal tea instead?
- 7 WATCH YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE** – alcohol is also a stimulant. A glass or wine of two may make you feel sleepy and fall asleep faster, but it will reduce your quality of sleep so you will likely wake up feeling groggy rather than refreshed.
- 8 DRINK MORE WATER** – it’s important to keep your body hydrated which will help to keep your energy levels up. Our bodies are made mostly of water so it’s important to keep topping up!
- 9 AVOID DAYTIME NAPS** – while this may seem tempting, it can actually make you feel worse and reduce the quality of your sleep at night.