[IMAGE]

Running on Empty: When Fatigue Stops You in Your Tracks

By Dr. Perry Nickelston

Are you running on empty? Is your life spiraling into one prolonged episode of fatigue? Are there days when your "gas tank" is so low that you're sleepy by lunchtime and craving a power nap by mid-afternoon? Ever wonder what's making you so tired all the time? There are many factors that can contribute to fatigue, including stress, poor eating habits, altered sleeping patterns, poor breathing, lack of exercise, too much exercise, and sometimes an underlying health condition. Most of the time, fatigue can be traced to one or more of your daily habits or routines. More than likely, you already know what's causing your fatigue; you're just not doing enough about it. Let's take a closer look at some of the most powerful changes you can make *today* to fight fatigue.

Find a Rest Stop

Fatigue rest stop - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Whatever happened to getting eight hours of uninterrupted sleep? When was the last time you actually hit that goal? Almost never, right? That's a shame because adequate sleep is one of the most effective ways to help your body recover and regenerate from the stressors of life. It is paramount to do whatever you can to get eight hours of sleep a night. Inadequate sleep negatively affects your endocrine (hormone) system, altering cellular regeneration and impairing optimum hormone function.

Researchers have found a lack of sleep decreases growth hormone, which may lead to an increase in age-related illnesses. There also may be an alteration in the glucose mechanism, a pathway your body uses for synthesis of sugar and insulin, which could increase your risk of diabetes and metabolic syndromes causing weight gain.

Sleep deprivation also may have a dampening effect on the secretion of thyroid-stimulating hormone and increasing blood levels of cortisol, especially during the afternoon and evening. Elevated cortisol levels are thought to be related to stress-related illness, insulin resistance and memory impairment.

So, what to do? Try going to bed a little sooner than usual. Start slowly at first; if you usually don't crash until 11:00 at night, don't shift to a 9:00 bedtime starting tonight or you may end up wide awake at 4:00

tomorrow morning. Transition slowly into the ideal sleep time that will get you those precious eight hours, and aim for that schedule on as many nights as possible.

Also avoid drinking caffeine late at night, since it is a stimulant and will prevent restful sleep. And avoid carbohydrates a few hours before bedtime, to prevent spikes in your insulin and cortisol levels. Finally, develop a relaxing routine that prepares you to fall asleep - and stay asleep. Such a routine can include a bath, reading, soft music, or even a half-hour of silence to process your day; whatever it takes to get you to doze off and sleep soundly.

Rev Your Engine

Fatigue rev your engine - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Exercise is a fantastic way to combat fatigue and increase energy while becoming healthy. They key is to not exercise so much that you end up sending your body into a state of overtraining and *more* fatigue. More is not better with exercise; better is better. It is recommended that you exercise 20-45 minutes three to four days per week. You must allow sufficient time for your body to recover from intensive workouts, so adequate rest is crucial if you want to achieve optimal results.

Exercise increases the metabolic hormones growth hormone and testosterone, which help maintain lean muscle and are a key to vitality. The more lean muscle you have, the faster your metabolism works and the less fatigued you feel. Weight training is the best exercise choice for increasing these metabolic hormones. Regular aerobic activity will increase oxygenation to your heart and reduce fatigue. If you are new to exercise, start off slowly and make sure you get a complete physical from your doctor prior to any strenuous activity.

Schedule Maintenance

Fatigue schedule maintenance - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Simply put, don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today, whether it’s changing your car’s oil, going to the grocery store or doing any of the daily tasks that get put off again and again. Get organized and make a plan of action to complete tasks. Procrastination leads to mental stress and anxiety. It’s the dread of anticipation that will take it out of you every time. To minimize the risk of perpetual procrastination, make a list of the "Top 5 Things to Do Before Noon" each day. Whatever task you want to do the *least* should be at the *top* of this list. Get these tasks over and done with before midday, and you won’t spend the day worrying and stressing about getting

them done. Then start on your To Do List for the remainder of the day.

You can prepare these lists ahead of time and organize your week in advance. After all, it's easier to avoid stress when you can plan your week of activities. Each night when you are getting ready for bed, create and read over your list for the following day. Buy a pocket organizer or use your smartphone task/calendar settings to store your schedule. Have a list of contacts and resources that are easily accessible. Check off your list after each task is completed; this will give you a sense of accomplishment.

Fuel Up

Fatigue fuel up - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Eating frequently helps to maintain normal blood sugar levels, preventing energy crashes during the day. If you wait too long between feedings, your insulin levels spike, causing your body to go on a hormonal roller-coaster ride. You will feel surges of energy followed by sudden crashes with tiredness, fatigue and lethargy. It is very difficult for your body to maintain a normal state of energy with big swings in metabolic hormones.

Try consuming three regular meals and two snacks per day, waiting no longer than three hours between meals. Never skip breakfast. Breakfast sets the tone for the day in terms of your metabolism. Combine macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates and fats) each time you eat. Limit simple carbohydrates such as juice drinks, bread, pasta, crackers, or processed foods, since these are known to cause mood swings from blood sugar changes. Combining macronutrients normalizes the glycemic index effects of foods on your blood sugar levels. This index traces how much blood sugar spikes in relationship to the food you eat. The lower the glycemic index number, the better for your body. Finally, eat more protein and fibrous carbohydrates to reduce digestive fatigue on the body.

Top Off Fluids

Fatigue top off fluids - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark First and foremost, dehydration leads to thirst. This has negative effects on body chemistry, and it takes your system about 24 hours to recover. This additional stress on your body can fatigue your adrenal glands (which control cortisol and adrenaline hormones) and neuromuscular system. There is also a decrease in the absorption of nutrients from food via the lining of your small intestines, since you body is more acidic with dehydration.

Your brain is 83 percent water. Dehydration can cause depression, dementia, anxiety, confusion, delirium and aggravation. Physical problems include fatigue, constipation and headaches. You might also become more susceptible to colds, allergies, and joint pain, since your immune system will weaken. All that can have a profound effect on your energy levels.

So, when it comes to water, how much is the right amount? Multiply your weight in pounds by 0.5 and 0.7. The numbers generated are the range, in ounces, of water you should drink each day. If you're not close to that range, don't worry; gradually increase your water intake over the next month or so. And as I've said before, keep in mind that caffeine is a natural dehydrator. That means you should drink 2 cups of water for every cup of caffeinated beverage you consume.

Get a Systems Check

Fatigue systems check - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Fatigue may be a sign of an underlying medical issue. If you still have symptoms of fatigue despite improving your lifestyle, it is highly recommended that you get a complete physical from your doctor. In fact, it's a good idea even if you aren't fatigued, particularly if you haven't had one in awhile. Don't try to self-diagnose your condition. Make an appointment to see a trained health care professional. Conditions that may cause fatigue include hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid), adrenal fatigue, chronic fatigue syndrome, anemia, heart disease, food intolerances (allergies), and other serious illnesses.

So often, we take feeling tired and fatigued for granted as being a normal part of our lives; however, it can be a cry for help from your body. Chronic fatigue is not a normal state for the body. Your body craves homeostasis, a state of normalcy and well-being. It will do whatever it has to in order to maintain that level of function, even sacrificing optimum function.

If you haven't had one in a while (or ever), it is recommended that you get a complete blood panel screening and have your hormone system evaluated for balance. Hormones are the chemical messengers of your body. A delicate balance exists between hormones; if there is too much of some and not enough of others, your health will be affected.

While these are some great ways to fight fatigue, they're not the only ones; you also may want to review a few smaller lifestyle issues to see if they are contributing to your fatigue. For example, if you are taking medications, fatigue could be a side effect. If so, ask your doctor if there is an alternative medication (or

better yet, a nutritional supplement, herb or even a lifestyle modification) that would be just as helpful. For example, many people take diabetes medication, but diet and exercise are powerful ways to keep diabetes under control - in most cases without requiring medication.

Fatigue running on empty - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Also consider the amount of time you are taking for yourself each day. Do you have any "me" time at all? A life of serving and worrying about others without caring for your own needs is extremely draining. Constant stress can also wear you down. This is a common problem for anyone who feels overwhelmed caring for their family, work, friends, *and* handling all their other responsibilities.

Finally, consider carefully the people you surround yourself with on a daily basis. Is someone dragging you down? Is there a stressful relationship that drains your energy more than restores it? If so, it is in your best interest to change your circumstances, distance yourself from the stress or find ways to make the situation better.

Life today can feel overwhelming, so much so that you may see no end in sight. However, by implementing some simple techniques, you can gain control over your body and mind, and ultimately your fatigue. The secret to gaining more energy and fighting fatigue is to consider every aspect of your current lifestyle and change whatever is necessary to bring a more peaceful, balanced sense to your daily routine. Don’t try to tackle it all at once. Start with small actions and work your way toward a more relaxed lifestyle. An energetic life awaits you - now go get it! You deserve it.

Fundamental Fatigue

fatigue - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark So, what exactly is fatigue? Quite simply, it is physical or mental weariness resulting from exertion. There is a decreased capacity or inability of your body to function normally because of excessive stimulation. Fatigue accumulates from pushing your mental and physical boundaries to the point that they have difficulty recovering. As a result, your body begins to function at a suboptimal level. The first part of recovery is recognizing the factors that may be contributing to your fatigue and then changing habits, circumstances, etc., to get that energy back.

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