

[IMAGE]

Fatigue – Combat It Naturally

By Julie T. Chen, MD

By dictionary definition, fatigue is physical or mental weariness; or in terms of physiology, the decreased capacity or complete inability to function normally due to excessive stimulation or prolonged exertion.

But for most of us, this concept of 'fatigue' means just a feeling of being worn out. As our schedules and lives become progressively busier, this level of feeling "fatigued" can start to occur at the beginning of our day instead of at the end of our day. So, how can we tell if we're just worn out from a busy schedule or that we should be concerned that the fatigue is an early warning sign for disease that's brewing in our worn out body?

Fatigue, more often than not, is a vague early warning sign for either mental or physical health concerns to come.

We all have some days where we are more tired and if you are generally awakening with good energy and have good energy until later in the evening, the rare days of fatigue are probably not a big deal. However, if you are consistently more fatigued on a daily basis compared to your prior years, this warrants an evaluation as to whether your emotional, mental, and physiological well-being is where it ought to be.

fighting fatigue - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Fatigue can be a reflection of many diseases, including but are not limited to, depression, thyroid disease, adrenal fatigue, vitamin/mineral deficiencies, allergen exposure, anemia, and other hormonal disruptions. It can be a non-specific expression of your body's ongoing inflammatory status or need to battle ongoing disease. Most patients who have diseases that have elevated levels of inflammation in the body experience a more consistently increased level of fatigue; such as in autoimmune diseases, ongoing infections, or cancer. So, if you are consistently more fatigued compared to prior years, you should first see your doctor for a full evaluation to rule out severe medical concerns.

If all of the labs and medical work up are negative, including depression or other psychiatric conditions, then the following steps may help in ameliorating factors that lead to or worsen fatigue:

1. **Avoid caffeine if you have insomnia.** You may think it helps to wake you up, but it's the sleep that you need to fight to the fatigue. So, ultimately the caffeine is working against you, instead of for you.
2. **Regain a regular sleep cycle.** Think back to your last vacation and see when you naturally feel tired and when you naturally awaken. And if these hours of sleep allowed you to awaken refreshed, then you should aim to go to sleep around that same time and get up around the same time every day. If that is not possible, try to go to sleep and wake up at the same reasonable time every day, even on weekends, to help your body establish a sleep cycle. Our bodies like rhythm, so having a regular sleep cycle helps to make you feel rested from those hours of sleep.
3. **Avoid processed and sugary foods.** Eating an anti-inflammatory diet allows your body to naturally be less inflamed and hence energy level is generally improved from eating clean.
4. **Stay hydrated with water or antioxidant decaffeinated teas.** Our bodies are machines and as with any machine, we need to make sure water is available for our metabolic processes to occur optimally. When our body is allowed to function in an optimal environment, there is less inflammation and hence less fatigue.
5. **Make time for exercise and relaxation break time.** Exercise and relaxation time is essential to our overall mental and physical well-being. Our body is created to move and to rest. So, if we short-change our body of either, it becomes worn out and overall physiological functioning declines. And we can potentially experience that as fatigue.

So, if you are feeling persistently fatigued, make sure to see your doctor to have a full evaluation. In the interim, take care of your body to ensure that it continues to be a highly functioning machine by making time for sleep, high quality nutritional foods, physical activities, exercise, and relaxation.

Your body will thank you for it!

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit

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