

Fatigue after stroke

What you need to know

- › Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy.
- › Talk with your doctor and allied health professionals about fatigue.
- › Get support from family and friends. Talk about what you are experiencing and how they can help.

About fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy. It's a persistent feeling that can get worse when you're active.

People with fatigue often describe having 'brain fog'. They talk about 'hitting a wall' and having to stop and rest.

About half of survivors experience fatigue. It can affect anyone. It usually starts in the first few weeks after a stroke. Everyone's level of fatigue will be different.

Fatigue can improve with time but there's no way to predict how much it will improve or how long it will take.

Causes of fatigue

Not enough is known about what causes fatigue. A range of things are likely to contribute to it.

After a stroke, everything you do – moving, thinking, talking – can take more effort.

Neuroplasticity is our brain's ability to change. After a stroke, uninjured parts of the brain can take over tasks injured parts used to do.

The parts of your brain taking on new functions are not as efficient, so you have to concentrate harder. This can make you feel more tired.

Other things that can contribute include:

- › Noisy, overstimulating environments.
- › Poor sleep or breathing problems while asleep.
- › Poor nutrition.
- › Pain.
- › Some medicines.

While fatigue is different to depression, people experiencing depression often feel tired, and their sleep habits may change.

Managing fatigue

Get advice from health professionals

Speak with your doctor about what could be contributing to your fatigue. If you're feeling low or finding it hard to cope, let your doctor know.

Allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and dietitians can help you manage fatigue.

Get to know your body and brain

You need to know what makes your fatigue better or worse. Keeping a diary can help you see triggers, patterns and changes.

Knowing your body and brain can help you find the right balance of activity and rest. People often learn to plan for being 'wiped out' after lots of activity.

Do things differently

Plan activities for when you think you will have the most energy.

Do tasks in a way that uses less energy. Break activities into steps and rest in between.

Try spreading activities throughout the day or week. Plan rest breaks.

Many people choose to focus on the people and things that matter most. Let some things go and free up energy for what's important to you.

Get healthy

Have good sleep habits:

- › Get up at the same time every day.
- › Get some early morning sunshine.
- › If you nap, do it early in the afternoon. Keep it to 20 minutes.
- › In the evening, make sure to wind down at least an hour before bed. Go to bed when your body tells you to.

Eat a healthy diet, drink enough water and avoid alcohol.

Exercise may help improve fatigue. Exercise each day. Even small amounts can help.

Plan for work and study

An occupational therapist can help you with a plan for work or study. Your plan may include starting with fewer hours and days before building up, and talking with your employer and colleagues about your fatigue.

Get support from family and friends

Share this fact sheet with family and friends. Talk about what you are experiencing, how you are feeling, what you are doing to manage it and how they can help.

Ask questions about events, activities and tasks. Let them know your limits. See if together you can make it work. Let them know fatigue can be unpredictable and that you may need to change plans.

Fatigue can make it difficult to get everything done. If someone offers you help, take them up on it.

Connecting with peers can also help – talking with people who get it and sharing what you've learnt.

Getting help

StrokeLine provides advice on stroke prevention, treatment and recovery. StrokeLine's allied health professionals can help you find the support and services you need.

Call **1800 787 653** Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Australian Eastern Standard Time.

Email strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au

EnableMe can help with your stroke recovery. Get the information you need and connect with other survivors and families. Visit enableme.org.au

To find an occupational therapist:
Occupational Therapy Australia otaus.com.au



About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

 strokefoundation.org.au

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