

DEALING WITH FATIGUE



People living with a chronic illness often need to make changes to their everyday lives. The examples in this brochure are meant as a guide only. We hope that you find some of these useful.

FEELING FATIGUED?

Depending on the stage of your hepatitis and general health, you may fall into the 67% of hep C positive people who battle fatigue. Treatment can also cause fatigue for many people; however ask your GP to check for any other possible causes, as it can be a symptom of many conditions. Hep C-related fatigue is your body fighting the virus. For many people this can be the most debilitating aspect.

When living with a chronic illness such as hep C, energy conservation should be a top priority, however diet is also an important factor in how you feel (see the *Hepatitis Australia* publication “Hepatitis C: a guide to healthy living”).

Ideally, take strategies to minimise the effects of fatigue on your life, as well as doing what you can to improve your health and energy levels. Many factors can also increase fatigue, for example stress, thus it is important not to push yourself too hard.

Life holds many fascinating pathways, sometimes it takes a threat to our health, our own state of being, to look at who we are and what we have. With planning, we all have the ability to make life easier.

Many positive (hep C+) people are lucky to have friends and family for support, although in some cases telling others close to you can be difficult (see publication “My Choice My Rights”). Where possible, organising a support network of the people you can trust can be invaluable. Try not to lose contact with your friends, family and colleagues. It is common to knock back invitations to lunch or other events when you experience regular fatigue, but try not to isolate yourself as this can lead to depression.

Also, remember to pace yourself - do not try to do too much and get help where you can (see list at the end). Be gentle with yourself and thank your body for what it does for you.

SOME IDEAS...

- Plan ahead - keep a diary to help organise activities, medical appointments, etc.
- When you have to knock back that invitation because you are feeling tired, take it as an opportunity to invite that person (and maybe others) for coffee or another low energy activity at a time that suits you.
- If you plan to go out in the evening, a rest in the afternoon followed by a bath (maybe with some added energising essential oils) may help to give you the required energy.

- Think positive - you cannot under-estimate the power of your own mind.
- Take it easy the afternoon and evening on the day before you have tiring things to do.
- Visualise yourself successfully and happily going through the activities you find difficult (there are many very helpful books on creative visualisation, ask at your local book shop). When it comes time, you will go through it without thinking.
- Complementary therapies such as Meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi and Reiki can help realign your inner energies and assist your immune system. These services are available at low cost for anyone with chronic illness at the Wellness Centre in Cottesloe. The centre has a library on inner healing and a new age, non-judgemental feel. Contact the Wellness Centre on (08) 984 3544.

LIFE IS TO ENJOY!

Make a list of things you enjoy doing and people you would like to see. Set your list out in ten sections, number one as needing very little energy for bad days, to number 10 – needing lots of energy. Remember that you need treats, not just health treatment!!!

Listen to your body, do what you feel you want to, as opposed to what you should (not forgetting that some things such as alcohol, excessive drug use and fatty foods make more work for your liver, which may make you feel worse). Attitude is a major factor in healing. The mind and body work together.

Make a plan for the day, week, month. Alternate heavy and light activities. Do strenuous activities in the morning while you are still rested, breaking the task up into simple parts if necessary. Spread tasks throughout the day with frequent rest periods in between and plan on lying down or napping if this is helpful. Do not attempt to accomplish more than is realistic.

Keeping fit is one of the best strategies for combating fatigue. Include light to moderate exercise routines in your everyday plans. Consider resistant type exercises - use light weights or common household items such as a phonebook to keep your muscles toned and ready. Plan to stretch before and after strenuous tasks. Remember - if you don't use it, you lose it!

To conserve energy and still keep looking after yourself, try cooking large amounts of food and freezing it in individual containers for future meals. Eating a variety of vegies bought fresh, not processed, has been found to increase energy levels.

If you find cooking is becoming too tiring and you are cutting corners with frozen TV dinners or fast foods (which have less goodness to sustain your immune system), home delivered meals may be an option. Food can be prepared to suit your special dietary needs and brought to your home weekly. Costs vary between districts and may be able to be negotiated with many service providers. To conserve your energy and get things done that you may not be able to do yourself, you may also find it helpful to make use of some of the various agencies that provide assistance with shopping, transport to medical appointments, gardening, minor house repairs. Commonwealth Carelink (1800 052 222) can provide you with information on services in your area. Your local council may also be able to give you information about these services.

To be eligible for subsidised services, you need to have a disability and be on a low income. Under the Equal Opportunity Act, hepatitis C is classified as a disability. If you are not on a disability pension, you may need an eligibility assessment. A letter from your doctor will help with this.

Prioritise - Think about which times of day that you usually feel best and try to arrange the most important tasks for these times. Make sure that you do not lose all of your social life - your immune system works better if you feel good about yourself.

Sleep - The average adult needs 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. While your body is doing extra work dealing with hep C, you may feel that this is insufficient. Stay away from caffeine in sodas, tea and chocolate at least six hours before bed, as these things may disturb your important sleep. Inadequate sleep can increase fatigue. Grandma's old idea of a warm glass of milk before bed has been proven to react with the serotonin and other chemicals in the brain. This can assist with a good night's sleep and feeling refreshed on awakening. A routine also helps, so try to go to bed at the same time. If you cannot sleep, get up and do something, watch an old movie or perhaps read.

Keep a journal; this can help clarify thoughts on how you feel. It may help to keep notes from medical appointments, what happened during the day, how you felt or any dreams. If things are worrying you, writing them down may help you let it go. A journal can also be a place to write your list of priorities, eg. important house chores you may need to do yourself, diet changes you may want to take, a schedule for light exercise, whatever is important to you. A note of changes in your fatigue levels and symptoms, as well as a note of what you were doing prior to that time may give you and/or your health professional's ideas on how to improve your quality of life.

REMEMBER, ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED TO.

Some other organisations providing assistance:

- Silver Chain – home help and nursing needs (08) 9242 0242 or 1300 650 803 (country)
- Volunteer Task Force – gardening, general household maintenance (08) 9318 5700
- People Who Care – gardening, transport to medical appointments and shopping (08) 9379 1944 (Head Office) or (08) 9535 3433 (SW Office)

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