

Secondary Conditions
Prevention & Treatment:
A Series—No. 4

Chronic Fatigue

The Research
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Center on
Independent
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Abstract: Just like anyone else, people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) may feel tired because they're ill, because they're stressed out, or simply because they've had a hard day. But people with SCI often face an ongoing fatigue that comes from a combination of physical, mental, and emotional problems.

Their extreme fatigue deeply affects their lives and adds to the daily challenges they face. Fatigue not only saps the energy they need to complete their daily tasks, but it also makes them feel depressed, helpless, lonely, and worthless. Because many people with SCI spend many waking hours in a wheelchair or a bed, others often perceive them as inactive. People with SCI may hear from others that they shouldn't be tired if they've just been "sitting around all day."

People with SCI need to understand the complex reasons why they may feel so tired, which may be medical causes, poor nutrition, or even Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Doing too much, environmental conditions, and lack of stimulation and exercise, for example, are physical causes of fatigue. Boredom and depression are emotional causes. Often the best treatments for easing chronic fatigue come when people make changes in their daily routine and lifestyles.

People can ease fatigue by doing the following:

- Reduce the amount of daily activities.
- Try to finish only what has to be done.
- Find someone to help them with their tasks.
- Let family members know how they' can help.
- Take more frequent breaks.
- Find equipment or devices that can help with daily living tasks such as a shower seat or long-handled shoe horn.
- Increase exercise.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- Meditate.
- Look into muscle conditioning.
- Keep a sense of humor.

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RTC/IL

Chronic Fatigue: A Common Complaint

Fatigue affects a large number of people on a fairly frequent basis. It affects those with and those without a disability. In fact, fatigue ranks seventh among the common, chief complaints patients discuss with their family doctors. Fatigue may be a common health complaint, but it's hard to measure.

Unlike a heartbeat, a blood pressure reading, or a blood count, fatigue can only be felt and described by the person who is tired. People describe their fatigue differently and cope with being tired in their own ways. Because fatigue is so personal, it's often hard for health care workers to detect the exact causes of the fatigue or suggest a cure.

The problem is made more complex because a number of physical and mental states can cause fatigue. Illness such as a cold or the flu can cause fatigue and so can low-grade infections. Allergies can make people tired, and so can sharp drops or increases in blood sugar levels. A lack of potassium, magnesium, or other minerals can tire a body, and chemical imbalances inside the body also can cause fatigue. Mental conditions such as stress, excitement, worry, anger, and anxiousness also can cause fatigue.

Just like anyone else, people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) may feel tired because they're ill, because they're stressed out, or simply because they've had a hard day. But people with SCI often face an ongoing fatigue that comes from a combination of physical, mental, and emotional problems.

Their extreme fatigue deeply affects their lives and adds to the daily challenges they face. Fatigue not only saps the energy they need to complete their daily tasks, but it also makes them feel depressed, helpless, lonely, and worthless. Because many people with SCI spend many waking hours in a wheelchair or a bed, others often perceive them as inactive.

People with SCI may hear from others that they shouldn't be tired if they've just been "sitting around all day." People with SCI need to understand the complex reasons why they may feel so tired. This booklet will help them think through the likely causes of their fatigue, persuade them to seek medical advice, and offer them tips on how to put more energy into their lives.

Acute fatigue

When talking about fatigue, many health professionals divide fatigue into two basic groups — acute and chronic. Acute fatigue is the normal tiredness people feel after they've used their muscles. The tiredness comes on quickly in the areas of the body that have been working or exercising, and it doesn't last long. A bike rider's legs may become tired after a long ride, or a wheelchair user's shoulders and arms may feel a burn after steady movement. A brief rest makes the legs, shoulders and arms feel okay again. Acute fatigue is normal and even helpful because it tells the body when it should take a break.

Chronic fatigue

Chronic fatigue, however, isn't normal. The person feels an extreme, overall tiredness that happens for no reason anyone can pinpoint, and it lasts longer than a few hours or a day. It often has a cumulative effect so that the person becomes weaker and more listless as time goes on. While normal or acute fatigue comes from work and exercise. Chronic fatigue has its roots in a physical or mental condition.

Chronic Fatigue Has Many Causes

Most health care professionals know that extreme fatigue often is a mix of physical and mental conditions. Acceptance of chronic fatigue as a health issue has become more widespread with reports on chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), auto-immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), and other viral infections.

But even before viral causes for fatigue were known and accepted, people have complained of fatigue. As much as 20 years ago, patients made an estimated 10 million visits to their doctors each year complaining of unusual fatigue symptoms.

A high number of complaints doesn't always mean a large amount of sympathy. People who suffer from chronic fatigue often have a hard time convincing others that they are ill. Unless people truly look like they're sick, their fatigue can be dismissed as being all in their heads.

It's not uncommon for many people to think that chronic fatigue really comes more from laziness than from illness. They think people who complain about chronic fatigue are hypochondriacs who always need to feel sick. These attitudes cause an extra emotional burden for those living with chronic fatigue. Not only must they find out what's wrong with them, but they also must convince people that something is, in fact, wrong.

Medical causes

Many illnesses and conditions can cause fatigue. People feel tired when they have a cold or the flu. Diseases such as diabetes, Lyme disease, lupus, post-polio syndrome, multiple sclerosis, sickle cell anemia, high or low blood pressure, an underactive thyroid, allergies, sensitivity to certain chemicals, and cancer can cause fatigue. People with SCI may also have muscle spasticity, which may cause muscles to tire. Sometimes the drugs used to treat a long- or short-term illness or condition can have side effects making someone tired. Sometimes not eating a healthful diet or not drinking enough fluids can make a body ill or unable to function at its best.

Poor nutrition

Proper nutrition and enough fluids help people maintain or increase their energy levels. Fatigue occurs when muscles don't have enough sugar reserves in the form of muscle glycogen or blood glucose. Healthful diets include plenty of complex carbohydrates.

Foods such as whole grain bread, rice, potatoes, beans, pasta, and corn keep the body nourished with glycogen and glucose, which the body needs to maintain energy. Ample supplies of glycogen and blood glucose won't keep someone from ever getting tired, but they will help the body keep moving longer before feeling fatigued.

Several small meals during the day can help maintain a person's energy more than one big meal. Complex carbohydrate snacks such as popcorn or a bagel will provide more sustained energy than cookies, which are filled with simple sugars.

When planning their daily meals, people should be sure they eat the recommended amount in each food group. They should limit the amount of fats and oils, sugars, and salt they use.

Fluid intake is also important. Too little fluids can cause the body to become weak from dehydration. Too many fluids can wash away minerals like potassium, which the body needs to function. About eight glasses of water, juice, and beverages without caffeine or alcohol is the common recommendation. Drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine help draw fluids out of the body so a person should drink enough water or juice to make up for that fluid loss.

Chronic fatigue syndrome

Chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, is one form of chronic fatigue that has received a great deal of notice. Some health care workers think of it as a fad disease, and some think CFS cases really are cases of fatigue caused by depression. The Centers for Disease Control and many health care professionals accept that some people who complain of prolonged exhaustion really have a disease called CFS, and are not suffering from depression. CFS is not common, but those who have it can face months, even years of intense fatigue. This list includes some of its' common features.

- The onset of fatigue can't be easily explained
- The fatigue affects mental and physical functions
- The fatigue follows a viral infection
- The fatigue lasts for weeks, even months
- The patient's immune system seems to be affected
- The patient is not recently depressed
- The patient does not have a know mental illness
- The person's energy and activity level drops by 50% or more
- The person has mans symptoms common to people with the flu, such as fever, sweats, overall aches and pains, swollen glands, dizziness, stomach aches, a sore throat, tender lymph nodes, and intense fatigue
- The person wants to be busy and active but fatigue stops him or her from doing desired activities
- The person gradually begins to feel better

CFS continues to baffle health workers. Some scientists now believe it is caused by a virus that affects a person's immune system. Some studies suggest that high levels of stress may trigger the disease.

The treatment for CFS is similar to the treatment for general chronic fatigue. Patients are taught how to relax and meditate. They are encouraged to eat healthful foods, to get enough rest, to pace themselves, and to reduce their stress levels. Some trial studies suggest that some medications may give CFS patients more energy.

In addition to a mental illness or a medical problem, a person might feel chronic fatigue from physical causes for fatigue such as a lack of stimulation or exercise, trying to do too much, or trying to get things done with equipment that doesn't work properly.

Mental or emotional causes

If no medical problem can be found for their ongoing fatigue, people sometimes see if there is a mental or emotional reason why they're so tired. People living with fatigue shouldn't be afraid to discuss their fatigue with a mental health care provider such as a social worker, a counselor, a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Some studies have shown that 30 to 80 percent of patients complaining of fatigue have some psychological reason for being tired. These same studies also show that only one-fourth of these patients believed their fatigue came from a mental state like stress or worry. Going to a "shrink" doesn't mean someone is mentally ill, and it doesn't mean their fatigue is all in their head or is a problem they just made up. After some tests and visits, a professional may help them figure out if their fatigue is related to something physical or medical, or if it is related to emotions or thinking.

Of all the mental health care providers, a psychiatrist is more likely to see fatigue as a symptom of a larger mental illness and is more likely to suggest a prescription drug as a way to fight fatigue. Social workers, counselors, and psychologists are more likely to try and get people talking about what might be causing the fatigue and to find ways to change their behaviors or the things that happen in their life to make them tired. Stress and major changes in a person's life can affect their mental health and their fatigue levels.

People with spinal cord injuries have to face many changes. They may have to adjust to lifelong wheelchair use. They may have to deal with a change in jobs or may be a shift to being unemployed. They have to adapt to changes in their social lives and to new ways of relating to their friends and families. Learning to adapt to these and other changes takes not only physical work, but also emotional energy. This physical, emotional, and mental work can make anyone tired. It can also make some people depressed.

Depression

Depression is one of the most common causes of fatigue and often is the first sign a health care worker looks for when a person complains of being tired. People who feel sad or "down" want to sleep a great deal. Depressed people also feel hopeless about their lives and helpless to make any changes for the better. These feelings make them avoid life and people through long sleeps or inactivity.

Many things can cause depression. Changes in the body's chemistry can cause sharp mood swings and make a person feel sad. Prescription drugs or alcohol and other non-prescription drugs also cause depression. Loss or major changes in a person's life or relationships can trigger depression. A severe injury or illness, the death of loved ones, loss of a job, or any unwanted move or change often make a person feel depressed. Sometimes this feeling can last for several weeks, and sometimes it lasts only for a little while.

People with spinal cord injuries face major physical changes in their lives. They no longer look the way they used to and they can't do some of the things they used to do or they have to learn how to do them differently. In the early stages of their recovery, they may feel weighted with the thought that life will never be good again. So it's no surprise that when people with SCI complain of fatigue if a health care worker does not find a medical problem, he or she will look for signs of depression.

Physical causes

Lack of stimulation and exercise

Boredom or a lack of stimulation can make people feel tired, and being alone adds to their fatigue. Sometimes people are alone for long periods of time, not because they want to be or because they are depressed, but because it is hard for them to leave their homes and get out into the community physically. People with SCI may have limited social contacts, or they may see the same people everyday. The sameness of their daily routine bores them, and boredom can grow into chronic fatigue.

A lack of exercise also can add to someone's fatigue. People can get more tired from sitting still and doing nothing than from moving around. The body needs to move. Movement helps the blood take oxygen to every part of the body, and oxygen makes people feel more lively. Movement keeps the muscles strong. People who sit in wheelchairs or lie in bed for long periods stop using their muscles as they once did. Their muscles become weaker from dis-use, and their body tires more easily because it gets less oxygen. With weaker muscles a person finds

even the simplest tasks can become tiring. Studies show that people with SCI lose some of their muscle mass, and their heart and lungs weaken from a lack of activity. In fact, cardiovascular weakness is a leading cause of death of people with SCI.

People with SCI who follow even a light exercise program have been shown to increase oxygen levels in their blood, lower their heart rate, increase their grip and arm strength, and gain an increased feeling of well-being. All of these benefits can help reduce fatigue. People with lower spinal lesions show the most gains in improved oxygen and heart-rate levels, but studies show that both paraplegics and quadriplegics may benefit from exercise.

Environmental factors

Sometimes people can ease their fatigue by repairing or replacing the equipment they rely on to complete their tasks of daily living. A wheelchair with bearings that are going out or a seat that's losing its support can cause or add to a person's fatigue. Many things in a living space can work against the wheelchair user. Carpeting with a thick pile or padding will make a manual wheelchair more difficult to push. A smooth surface lets the chair roll easily. Furniture arranged in a way that makes it hard to get through a room adds to the burden of getting from place to place. Often-used items that are too high to reach easily can add to the body's physical stress.

Doing too much

Sometimes people try to do too much in one day and they forget to pace themselves by spreading their work out evenly over several hours. Everyone seems to be in a hurry and worried about getting enough done. Consequently, people forget to take a break, or they don't think they should take time to rest.

Resting is a natural way for the body to regain its energy. Sometimes a person can suffer from fatigue that is caused by more than one thing. It's possible that a person can have fatigue that has a mental, medical, and physical cause. A visit to a health care professional would be a person's first step in finding out what could be causing his or her chronic fatigue.

Finally, before going to a doctor or other health care professional with their chronic fatigue problem, people with SCI should find out if the professional they've chosen has worked with people who have spinal cord injuries. Professionals who have limited or no experience with SCI may not be familiar with the many things that cause fatigue in people who have SCI.

Affects of Fatigue on People With SCI

Many people with SCI can be deeply affected by chronic fatigue. It not only hinders their physical abilities but also affects their mental health. Chronic fatigue may make people with SCI too weak to perform their activities of daily living.

It can also keep them confined at home because they have no energy to get out in the world. As their daily life becomes more difficult, they may feel depressed, bored, hopeless, and helpless. These feelings will add to their exhaustion and begin a cycle of fatigue and depression that is hard to break.

Fatigue also can affect their self-esteem. Already limited by their injuries, they find they can do even less. If they have a job, they may become too tired to go to work. Their chronic fatigue will affect how much energy they can give to spouses, children, and friends. They may start to feel alone and isolated and too dependent on others for their care. Left untreated, their exhaustion could set up a downward spiral of helplessness and depression.

Treatments

Often the best treatments for easing chronic fatigue come when people make changes in their daily routine and lifestyles. People can ease fatigue by doing the following:

- Reduce the amount of daily activities
- Try to finish only what has to be done
- Find someone to help them with their tasks
- Let family members know how they' can help
- Take more frequent breaks
- Find equipment or devices that can help with daily living tasks such as a shower seat or long-handled shoe horn.
- Increase exercise
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Meditate
- Look into muscle conditioning
- Keep a sense of humor

The suggestions in this list fall into three basic groups:

Change or reduce the day's tasks

People who live with chronic fatigue must limit what they can do during the day and focus on how to complete those tasks. They might drop those things that don't have to get done because a smaller work load may leave them with more energy.

Get help from other people and assistive technology

Help from others: People living with fatigue should talk to the people they live with and their friends or care givers about how they can help with some of the daily tasks. Some people even those who are close to the person with SCI, may not know he or she needs help unless the person asks for it. Some people believe that a person with SCI indicates a sense of security and acceptance of his or her limitations when that person can ask others for help. When a person with SCI reaches out to others for help, he or she gives friends and family members a chance to feel positive and useful.

Help from assistive devices: Many adaptive tools or devices can help reduce the effort it takes to get things done. A reacher is an example of a tool that can help a wheelchair user reach things more easily. Peers with disabilities or an occupational therapist could suggest many ways to adapt living spaces and ways to use ones personal energy more efficiently.

A window or central air-conditioner is one piece of equipment that can help a person fight off fatigue during hot weather. Except in the coolest climates, heat and humidity from the spring through late fall can sap a person's energy.

Help from muscle conditioning: Studies show that the muscles of people with SCI and multiple sclerosis have greater fatigue than the muscles of non-disabled people. Their muscles go through long periods of disuse or altered use and they become shorter and weaker with time. Some studies have shown that these changes can be reversed somewhat or halted when the muscles are conditioned through exercise and stretching. Some studies have shown that these changes can be reversed somewhat or halted when the muscles are conditioned through exercise

and stretching. Some studies have shown a method called functional electrical stimulation (FES) also can make unused muscles more resistant to fatigue. FES uses electrical signals to condition the muscle. People who have limited use of their muscles should talk to a physical therapist about the things they can do to help improve their muscles' condition.

Self-Help

Many of the things suggested to help ease chronic fatigue can be done by the person living with that fatigue. Getting enough rest, learning relaxation or meditation techniques, and adding some light exercises to the daily routine are things people can learn and manage for themselves.

Rest: Frequent, short rest periods work better than long ones to refresh the both. At the start of a rest period, the heart rate slows quickly and then evens out the longer a person rests. Many short rests give the heart more chances to benefit from a quick slow down.

Relaxation techniques: Some people have great success using one or a combination of relaxation methods. Some of these activities include yoga, meditation, deep breathing, and guided mental imagery. These methods often are referred to as holistic healing because they work to help the body by using the person's whole self— mind and body to improve health.

These techniques help fight fatigue because they bring oxygen into the body, they include mild exercise, they help the body relax, and they reduce stress. All of these help restore energy to a body that's tired. These methods also have the added benefit of helping people fight their fatigue by using their own powers of breathing and imagination.

Yoga: Yoga uses simple stretching exercises, steady breathing, and the mind to relax the both and make it feel refreshed. Traditional yoga works on moving the entire body, but yoga exercises also can focus on the muscles in one part of the body, such as the face, neck, shoulders, hands, and arms. Yoga includes exercises and relaxation techniques for everyone, regardless of their physical limitations.

Meditation and breathing: When a person meditates or does deep breathing exercises, he or she becomes quiet and consciously tells the body to relax. These methods can be used by anyone, even people with limited movement. They can help relax the body even when practiced as little as fifteen minutes a day. What's important is that a person practice some each day.

Guided mental imagery: Thinking about positive things makes people feel happy and helps them cope with things that are hard or unpleasant. When someone uses visualization, he or she imagines something pleasant and these thoughts help the person relax. People can also imagine a part of the body that is causing trouble. People who live with fatigue might imagine their tired arms and shoulders or how heavy their head and neck feels. Thinking of these parts of the body causes more blood to flow there. The person holds his or her mind to the spot and then imagines something good happening to that area. For example, the person might imagine warm water washing over the muscle or bright light wrapping around it. These thoughts can help the body feel refreshed and relaxed.

Each of these holistic methods has been used for hundreds of years. Often classes in one or all of these techniques are offered through adult education classes at a local high school, YMCA, college, or recreation center. In some parts of the country, people skilled in relaxation therapy are licensed to offer help with these methods.

Exercise: Light exercise helps to tone muscles; it boosts energy by increasing the level of oxygen in the body, and it can reduce the muscle spasticity or contractions that affect some people with SCI.

The extent of the spinal lesions will determine the types of exercise best suited to each person. At first, fatigue may limit what a person can do. Some people with SCI can use their chest, arms, and shoulders for aerobic exercise. They can also increase their muscle mass and strength by lifting weights.

People with higher-level spinal cord injuries can use simple deep breathing exercises to increase the oxygen levels in their blood. They may be able to perform simple stretching or isometric exercises to develop and keep some muscle tone and to reduce spasticity. Some people with SCI may need someone else to stretch their arm and leg muscles and extend their joints through a full range of motion.

Where available, aquatic fitness programs have been shown to reduce fatigue and improve strength and work capacity. Pushing a wheelchair for a set distance can improve cardiovascular health, and lifting weights can increase strength and flexibility.

Medications

Some doctors prescribe mood-altering medications to fight chronic fatigue. While medicines won't cure the fatigue, some can make a person feel more energetic. Success with these drugs depends on how well the person can talk to his or her doctor. The person must let the doctor know when the drug causes good or bad changes in the body or state of mind. This information will help the doctor adjust the dosage to the right level.

These prescription drugs also can have side effects. They may cause sleepiness and low blood pressure. Because they draw water from the body's tissues, they may also cause dry mouth, constipation, and fluid retention. Problems with fluid retention and elimination are critical to people with SCI who must be watchful of their fluid intake, constipation, and stress on the bladder.

Some medications also can reduce muscle spasticity, which can cause fatigue. Some of these drugs can deepen a person's fatigue, impair thinking, and cause depression. Before trying prescription medicines, a person living with fatigue should be sure to try non-drug treatments first and use medications as one of the last methods to fight their fatigue.

Final Thoughts

Chronic fatigue is a major problem for many people with spinal cord injuries. A mix of physical and mental challenges often are at the root of a person's fatigue. The first step in finding the reasons behind fatigue and ways to increase energy levels begins with a visit to a health care professional.

Using the information and tips in this booklet should help everyone find ways to reduce fatigue and increase overall health and energy.

Terms You May Hear

Carbohydrate (car-bo-hi'-drate): Sugars, starches, and plant fibers that give the body a steady source of energy.

Cardiovascular (car-dee-o-vas'-qu-ler): The system in the body that is made up of the heart and blood vessels.

Depression (De-press'-shun): The state of feeling blue or sad that can include prolonged sleepiness and often an inability to think. Depression can come from something that has happened in a person's life, such as death of a loved one or other drastic change. It can also come from chemical changes in the body or the body's reaction to alcohol or medications.

Glucose (gloo'-kos): A colorless to yellowish syrupy mixture that the body makes from the tissues of plants and animals.

Glycogen (gli'-ko-gen): A white, sweet-tasting substance that the body makes from digested food and glucose then stores in the liver for future energy.

Health care worker: This broad term can refer to a number of professionals who work in the health-care field: doctors; nurses; physical, occupational, and relaxation therapists; and psychiatrists.

Hypochondriac (hi-po-kon'-dree-ak): A person who is obsessed with the idea that he or she is ill or will become ill. The person may have real pain even when no illness is present

Immune (im-yoon') system: The system within the body that defends a person against the bacteria and virus that cause illness.

Isometric (i-so-met'-rik) exercise: Exercises that make a muscle stronger by contracting or tightening the muscle and holding that tightness for a brief period. Isometric exercises do not involve making the muscle lift or stretch, so they can be done by people with limited movement.

Mental health care worker: This broad terms can refer to a number of professionals trained in counseling and mental health: psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, counselor, and case manager.

Multiple sclerosis (skle-ro'-sis): Demyelination occurring in patches throughout the white matter of the central nervous system. Sometimes extending into the gray matter

Psychiatrist (si-ki-a-trist): A medical doctor trained in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illness.

Psychologist (si-kol'-o-gest): A person who is trained to understand mental processes and behaviors.

Spasm (spaz'-em): A sudden, uncontrolled tightening or contraction of a muscle or a group of muscles.

Spasticity (spa-stis-e-ti): Spasms in the muscles that cause them to tighten or jerk around.

Locate Your Trouble Spots

Go through these three checklists for the medical, mental, physical, and daily living causes of fatigue. By looking at where you have the most check marks, you can get a better picture of which area or areas might be affecting your fatigue.

Medical causes

Changes in your physical health can cause fatigue. Which, if any, of the following statements apply to you'?

- I have a fever
- I have swollen lymph nodes
- I have a sleep disorder
- I have a sore throat
- I often have headaches
- I feel sick to mm stomach
- I have night sweats
- I have joint pain
- I feel dizzy
- I have been outside where I could have gotten a tick bite
- I have been told I have a serious illness such as cancer, diabetes, or high blood pressure
- I am taking prescription drugs

If you checked off one or more of these statements, your fatigue may be the result of something going on inside your body. For example, you may have a low-grade infection, or you may have gotten Lyme disease from a tick bite. Make an appointment with your doctor or clinic so you can find out if there's a physical reason why you're tired.

Changes in your mental health can cause fatigue. Something going on in your life may be affecting how you feel about life, yourself, and others. Which, if any, of the following sentences apply to you?

- I am worried about myself or a member of my family.
- I have money problems
- I often feel sad, depressed, or "blue"
- I love someone who has died or become ill
- I have lost my friends
- I have moved to a new home or job
- I have lost my job
- I have been fighting with my spouse, children, or friends
- I feel angry
- I have a new care giver

If you checked off one or more of these statements, your fatigue may be the result of changes or losses in your life. Dealing with these changes may be making you tired. Meet with a mental health professional so you can talk about your fatigue and what's going on in your life. You can call a counselor, social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist or your local mental health clinic for help in seeing how changes in your life may be affecting your energy levels.

Physical causes

Sometimes a lack of physical activity or stimulation can cause fatigue. Which, if any, of the following sentences apply to you?

- I often don't leave the house for many days
- I'm alone for long periods of time
- I rarely have visitors
- My life is pretty much the same from day to day
- I often feel bored
- I have few or no hobbies
- I sit or lie in one position for many hours
- I exercise rarely or never
- My day is mostly spent watching television
- I rarely read or listen to music
- I don't have a pet

If you checked off one or more of these statements, your fatigue may be the result of inactivity and boredom. A simple change in routine such as getting out of the house during the week or having people come for visits may reduce your boredom and your fatigue. Talk with your peers to see what they do during their days at home. You can also talk to a counselor, social worker, or someone at your independent living center to see if they can help you get out more or increase your activities at home.

Daily living can cause fatigue

Changes in our daily routine, problems getting around in your home or at your job site, or a different way of eating also can cause fatigue. Which, if any, of the following sentences apply to you?

- I am learning how to use assistive equipment
- I find it hard to get around in my house or apartment
- I have moved to a new house or apartment
- I get less sleep than I once did
- I get less exercise than before
- I eat more or less than usual
- I eat a lot of "junk" food
- I use alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs
- I use my arms and shoulders more during the day
- I have started some new activities
- I have made some new friends

If you checked off one or more of these statements, your fatigue may come from changes in your daily life. You may be tired because you're still getting used to a new activity or routine. These

changes also may affect your sleeping and eating patterns or may cause you to travel more in your wheelchair or on your crutches. Meet with a physical therapist to discuss how assistive technology, exercises, or new ways of completing your tasks of daily living might reduce your fatigue.