

Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

Managing Fatigue

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



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CAPA Canadian Arthritis
Patient Alliance
experience · perspective · voice



Objectives

By the end of the session, you will:

- Understand the causes of fatigue
- Learn strategies to help manage your fatigue

What is fatigue?

- Fatigue is an ongoing feeling of “extreme tiredness” that is not relieved by sleep/rest
- Chronic fatigue is the “silent symptom” of arthritis:
 - Drains energy, makes it difficult to do daily activities and follow a treatment plan
 - Increases pain
 - Decreases ability to cope
 - Makes concentration and decisions difficult



Fatigue: Physical factors

These are physical causes of fatigue:

1. Disease process:

- Acute or ongoing joint inflammation
- In diseases like Rheumatoid Arthritis, systemic inflammation (as you might experience with the flu) may accompany joint inflammation
- Anemia (low hemoglobin due to a drop in red blood cells)

2. Disrupted sleep:

- Sleep is not refreshing due to pain, worry or medications

Fatigue: Physical factors

3. Physical inactivity:

- “Use it or lose it” - being unable to move/exercise as much as you would like can cause more fatigue and pain

4. Compensating for arthritis pain by favoring a joint can cause more stress and drain energy

5. Pain:

- Leads to increased feeling of fatigue

Fatigue: Emotional factors

1. Emotions like anxiety, worry or sadness can cause or increase fatigue
2. Hiding disease/symptoms from others (for example, due to pride) can leave them unaware, and can increase your stress and over-tax your energy
3. Emotional “high” when pain subsides due to medications can cause overdoing physical activity and subsequent flares/fatigue
4. When you are tired, your ability to cope with day-to-day stresses can be put to the test

What strategies help manage fatigue?

Spending energy wisely to fight fatigue: The five P's

1. Priorities
2. Pacing
3. Planning
4. Posture
5. Problem Solving

The five P's: Priorities



- List your activities (fun and work) for a typical week
- Rearrange your list by categories and in order of importance (priorities), then consider:
 - If the activities you've listed are your priorities or someone else's
 - If these activities truly have to be done
 - The actual time frame for completion
 - Is there a priority given to enjoyable activities
 - If you can do any of these activities less often
 - If others can do some of these activities you do for them
 - If your expectations realistic - can you say “no” to unrealistic expectations?
 - If you can say “no” when your own expectations are too high
 - If you are making exercise a priority (getting enough exercise?)
 - If you are eating properly?

The five P's: Pacing

- Pacing yourself allows you to spend your energy wisely
 - A 10-minute break each hour can prevent fatigue, re-energize you and take less time than recovering from over-extending
- Complete these statements to help set your pace:
 - I can sit for ___ minutes before I have to change positions
 - I can stand for ___ minutes before I feel uncomfortable
 - I can walk for ___ minutes/blocks before I need to sit down
- Develop similar statements for other activities you do
- Break tasks up into manageable pieces
 - For example, vacuum one room in the morning and another in the afternoon, or the next day



The five P's: Planning

- Develop a weekly schedule that balances priorities with rest periods, at a pace you can handle
 - Can you break down activities into smaller units?
 - Can you delegate some tasks?
 - Can your doctor schedule pain medication differently so it's at peak level when you need it?
 - Are there other pain-management techniques that would help you save more energy?
 - Are you getting enough rest and sleep?



The five P's: Posture

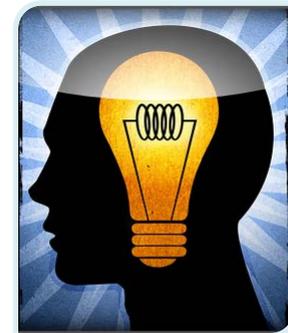
- Proper positioning conserves energy by avoiding strain
- Changing positions frequently can help prevent-overuse of a muscle group
- Adjust the heights of chairs and desks or worktables properly to each other
 - Chair height (floor to seat cushion) should be distance from base of heel to back of knee plus 7 cm
 - Top of desk should be 5 cm lower than bent elbows when sitting up straight
- Place most frequently used items within easy reach at your workspace, kitchen and other areas



The five P's: Problem solving

Ask yourself:

- Is there an easier way to do a task?
- Are there any shortcuts I can take?
- Are there any devices that can make tasks easier?
- Is there anything that I can buy to make tasks easier (for example, buying pre-grated cheese or chopped nuts for a recipe)?



Assistive devices

- These are aids that allow us to do things more easily
- They help us use less effort or energy on a task
- They help us conserve energy and allow us to have energy for things we love doing



Assistive devices

- Many examples of assistive devices exist in our day-to-day lives that we do not consider
 - A cane is an assistive device that people often hesitate to use because of the image it portrays
 - However, a cane often allows a person to walk further and more easily so that greater well-being can be attained



Assistive devices: Splints

- Splints can be very helpful in supporting joints that have local inflammation
- A splint can immobilize a painful joint while still allowing other joints to be active, increasing function
- Splints and orthotics can be pre-fabricated or custom made, and there are many different types of splints for different activities
- Ask an occupational therapist about which splints are right for you



Assistive devices: Footwear

- Supportive, proper fitting footwear can do wonders for tired feet
- Running shoes provide support while still providing shock absorption when feet, ankles, knees, hips and the back are sore
- Ensure that you buy shoes that are wide enough for you
- Buying proper fitting shoes may require going to a store that gives individual attention to shoe size and fit



Assistive devices: Orthotics for footwear

- Orthotics may be necessary if your feet require support in specific areas
 - In inflammatory arthritis, there is often inflammation at the “ball” of the foot; an orthotic can be built up in that area to provide support and greater ease in walking
- Orthotics can be bought off the shelf or custom made
- See an occupational therapist or podiatrist to find out which type of orthotic is right for you



Strategies for restful sleep

- Invest in a quality mattress or mattress pad for firm yet comfortable support (avoid waterbeds)
- Try to establish a sleep schedule routine and stick to it
 - Try to go to bed by 10 pm or 11 pm to ensure a more restful night of sleep
- Reduce stimulants and heavy meals in the evening
- Exercise regularly earlier in the day



Strategies for restful sleep

- Manage your pain and stress for sleep
 - Use relaxation strategies such as a warm bath/shower, breathing exercises, meditation/relaxation exercises, or sleep hypnosis with the aid of CDs
 - Work with your doctor to adjust medications as needed to provide pain relief throughout the night
- Adjust your sleep environment
 - Keep bedroom cool, dark and quiet
 - Use bedroom for sleep and sex only
- Ensure that painful areas are well supported during sleep
 - Speak with your family doctor or therapist if your joints continue to interfere with sleep

Key messages

- Fatigue is a common symptom of inflammatory arthritis
- You can decrease your fatigue by:
 - Getting your inflammatory arthritis under control
 - Reducing emotional and physical stress on your body
- Consider the 5 P's:
 - Priorities
 - Pacing
 - Planning
 - Posture
 - Problem solving

Resources

- Arthritis Consumer Experts www.jointhehealth.org
- The Arthritis Foundation www.arthritis.org
- The Arthritis Society www.arthritis.ca
- Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance www.arthritispatient.ca
- Canadian Psoriasis Network www.cpn-rcp.com
- Canadian Spondylitis Association www.spondylitis.ca
- Rheuminfo www.rheuminfo.com
- The Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org
- Overcome fatigue: a 7- step program, e-learning module www.education.arthritis.ca
- Fatigue & Arthritis Booklet

www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/arthritis-and-daily-life/fatigue.aspx

Resources

- Lorig K, Fries J. *The Arthritis Helpbook: A Tested Self-management Program for Coping with Arthritis and Fibromyalgia*. Fifth edition. Perseus Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000.
- *Managing Your Fatigue* (brochure) by The Arthritis Foundation
- Maas JB et al. *Power Sleep* (2001). HarperCollins Publishers, New York
- Maas JB et al: *Sleep for Success. Everything You Must Know About Sleep But Are Too Tired To Ask*. (2011). AuthorHouse, Bloomington, In