

Inflammatory Arthritis Education Series

Managing Fatigue

This program has been reviewed and endorsed by



Canadian Arthritis
Patient Alliance

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all content was developed independently by
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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:

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)

Disrupted sleep

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

Physical inactivity

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

Pain

- Leads to increased feeling of fatigue

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

Fatigue: Emotional factors

Emotions like anxiety, worry or sadness can cause or increase fatigue

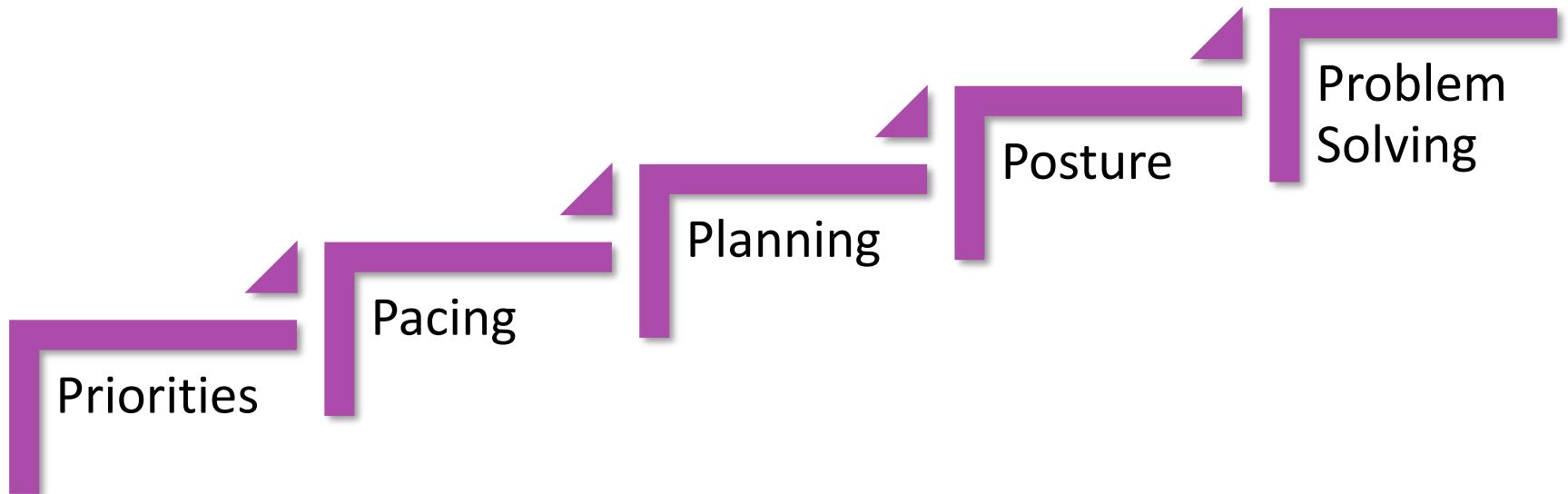
Hiding disease/symptoms from others (for example, due to pride) can leave them unaware, and can increase your stress and over-tax your energy

Emotional “high” when pain subsides due to medications can cause overdoing physical activity and subsequent flares/fatigue

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



The five P's: Priorities

First, list your activities (fun and work) for a typical week. Next, 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 (and develop similar statements for other activities you do):

- 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

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?

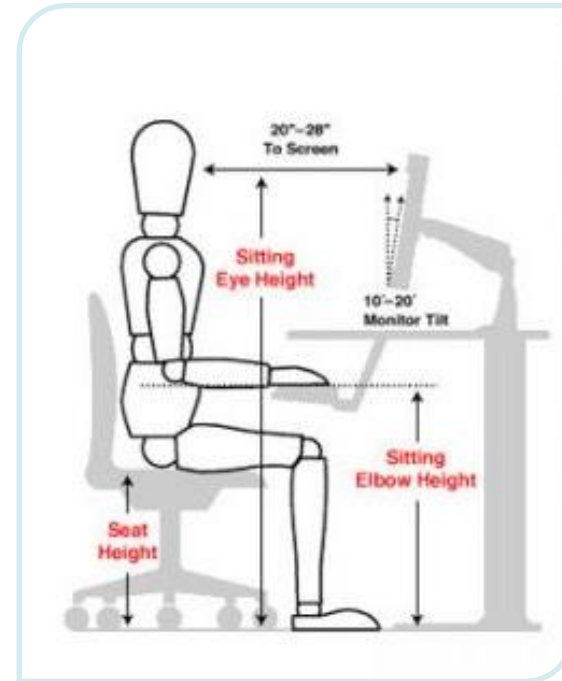
The five P's: Posture

Proper positioning conserves energy by avoiding strain

Changing positions frequently can help prevent overuse of a muscle group

Place most frequently used items within easy reach at your workspace, kitchen and other areas

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

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
- 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 and Footwear



- 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



- 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 Foundataion

www.sleepfoundation.org

Canadian Nurses Association

www.cna-nurses.ca/cna

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists

www.caot.ca

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

www.thesehands.ca

Dietitians of Canada

www.dietitians.ca

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.
- 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
- The Arthritis Society's "Fatigue and Arthritis" - <https://arthritis.ca/support-education/online-learning/overcoming-fatigue/fatigue-and-arthritis>
- Versus Arthritis's "Managing Fatigue" - <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/managing-symptoms/managing-fatigue/>