

Dealing with Fatigue and Flares

A resource for patients, by patients

Raising children is exhausting at the best of times and made worse when you live with fatigue from inflammatory arthritis. It is important to remember that parenting is a marathon, not a race to the finish. Children at all stages of development can also keep you up at night making it more difficult for people living with inflammatory arthritis. Despite these challenges, it's important to put yourself first and remember that if you aren't well then you will not be able to effectively care for your child(ren). Remember that all parents – whether they live with a chronic disease or not - need help in raising their children. We rely on our partners, family, friends, neighbours, daycare workers, teachers, and many others. It really does take a village to raise a child. Here are a few tips on how you can manage arthritis, fatigue, and flares:

- Manage your disease first and foremost. Take it slow some days if you need to.
- Manage your energy levels. For example, if your child has kept you up all night, it's OK to slow down the next day or even for several days afterward.
- Remember that parenting takes a lot of energy. You may have to re-prioritize life and tasks compared to life before you became a parent.
- Never under-estimate the importance of routine! Establishing a routine for bedtime, sleeping, feeding, and playtime not only helps your baby/child, but may help manage your arthritis fatigue too.
- You may feel guilty because you may not have the same energy or be able to do what other parents. Resist the

“Parenting requires creativity and patience. In some ways it has made being diagnosed with RA easier. I'm used to trying to get sleep when I can or figure out how to juggle competing needs. It has also allowed me to learn how to ask for help when I truly need it. Some days are good, and some days are just really tough. I learn from the tough ones - how to be a better parent or a better patient and how to take care of myself. The good days allow me to feel grateful and appreciative and feel more connected.”

temptation to compare yourself to other parents. Read [more](#) from a parent who lives with RA.

- Create many safe places to put your baby down throughout your home. This could be a crib, co-sleeper, pack and play, swing, bouncy seat, etc. These may help you conserve energy whenever you need it!
- Making decisions on how to feed your baby is a personal one that is best made by you. There is a lot of pressure on new Moms that “breast is best,” but it isn’t necessarily the best choice, especially for one living with a chronic illness. Breastfeeding can be an additional physical strain on a new mom, can cause additional fatigue and may not be possible for all women.
- Every parent has heard this, but it will be re-stated here. Sleep when your baby sleeps. Your house may be a mess, you may still be in your pyjamas but that’s OK. Take a nap even if that means asking someone to come over to care for your child.
- If you have a two-story house, create a place on each level for diaper changes to reduce the amount of effort needed to bring your child up and down the stairs.
To conserve energy, set up a changing area on each floor of the house. This will conserve energy, so you don’t need to carry your child up and down the stairs several times a day!
- Life is full of trade-offs. Set priorities about what is important to you and dedicate your energy to these priorities. Get help with any household chores or other commitments.
- It’s OK to pay for help, such as a cleaning service, if you can afford it. Groceries can be ordered on-line and there are meal preparation services. Consider using these services if it can help you save energy.
- Find people to talk to – your own support network, other parents with arthritis, other new parents. Everyone understands how tiring and exhausting newborns and children

“As my children get older, I find I am busier trying to keep on top of their lives. It is much more mentally draining but so worth it if you can stay connected. They do not care so much about a sink of dirty dishes but giving them your undivided attention will pay off tenfold. So I have to rest when they are in school and be prepared to let certain things slide in order to be there for them.”

can be. Reach out to support networks, such the [Mamas Facing Forward Facebook group](#).

- Recruit a neighbourhood “nanny’s helper”. Pre-teens often want to get babysitting experience and are eager to come over to help for a few hours to help. Think of friends with children in this age group or ask around.
- Even if you are exhausted, never underestimate the benefits of a walk.
- If your child is up in the night (and this can happen when they are older too!), take turns with your partner waking up with your child. When dealing with numerous night waking’s, ensure that each partner gets a longer stretch of sleep, if at all possible.
- It’s OK to sleep with your child at night if that enables everyone to get a better night’s sleep. There are different products that can help you sleep securely with your baby, such as [Arm’s Reach*](#), a mini crib that can be attached securely to the side of a bed.

*** Specific product recommendations are based on personal use only. CAPA and Mamas Facing Forward have no connection or relationship with any company or product mentioned.**