

## All Parents Get Tired, but...

By: Catherine Backman

Everyone experiences high and low energy, especially new parents. And parents of toddlers, school-aged kids, and teenagers. Parenting is a highly valued role, people want to be good parents, and there are unique challenges and surprises across children of all ages. Managing arthritis symptoms like arthritis pain and fatigue can complicate decisions (and feelings) around caring for and nurturing children.

The fatigue you feel is real. It is not the same as being tired. When we're tired, there's a relatively easy fix: a good night's sleep, a little rest and rejuvenation, some "me time" to focus on doing something to restore oneself physically and mentally. The sometimes-unrelenting fatigue that comes with arthritis requires more than a nap: it takes a longer-term plan for energy management. In research studies, descriptions of arthritis fatigue are very different from the tiredness that is familiar to most people. For example, one research participant told me how she was so overwhelmed with fatigue that when she found herself alone in an elevator, she pushed the emergency stop button and sank to the floor. This doesn't happen when we're tired, it happens when fatigue is unrelenting and uncontrolled.

In a study of more than 350 mothers with and without inflammatory types of arthritis (like rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, juvenile arthritis, and lupus), we measured both fatigue and energy using validated scales. Mothers with arthritis reported much higher fatigue than mothers without arthritis. They also reported much lower energy than mothers without arthritis. Both fatigue and energy scores were related to performance of parenting tasks: regardless of an arthritis diagnosis, mothers with more fatigue or lower energy reported greater difficulty doing parenting tasks, like dressing and bathing young children, or helping older children with school. Arthritis can interfere with *doing* the job of a parent.

However, when it came to mothers' belief in their parenting effectiveness, there was no relationship between fatigue/energy and *being* a parent. Mothers with and without arthritis reported a similar sense of satisfaction with their roles as parents. So that's good news for our self-confidence as parents, but in the meantime, we have kids who need care.

The take away message is to integrate energy management strategies into the job of parenting, rather than thinking of them in isolation. Ask for (or accept) help: if active sports or play isn't going to fit in the plan, invite someone else to get involved with your kids. One study participant pointed out that a weekly "grandpa day" was when her dad took her kids for outdoor sports and she enjoyed a little quiet time – a win-win-win for all. If you're struggling to anticipate how to plan for future parenting tasks, consider spending time with someone who has a child a little older than yours so you can see the demands first hand. One study participant helped her friend with twin toddlers so she could see what might be involved for her baby in the months ahead. That helped her think through the kinds of fastenings she wanted (or avoided) on her son's clothes, what tasks she might ask her husband to manage, and how she might plan her days to best manage her energy and her son's needs.

Check out some of the great tips from parents for parents elsewhere on the [CAPA website](#).