



Fatigue Self-Management

A guide for patients, families and friends



This is a guide to Fatigue Self-Management that you may find helpful, to support you during this difficult time. These have been created for you, as we are not able to provide our usual therapy services here at Saint Francis Hospice at the moment.

This information has been put together by the Therapies team, however these are suggestions only and should not replace your usual medical advice.

If you would like to speak to a member of the therapies team to discuss what may be of benefit to you, please contact us on **01708 753319** ext **2224 / 2268 / 3053** and speak to a member of the team.

For more complementary therapy guidance on our website, visit **www.sfh.org.uk/terminal-illness-covid-19**



What is fatigue?

Fatigue is described as:

- ♥ Overwhelming tiredness
- ♥ Disproportionate to the activity you have been completing
- ♥ Is not significantly improved following rest periods
- ♥ Restricts your ability to manage everyday activities

It is the most commonly reported symptom amongst people with cancer and MS and affects a variety of people with long term conditions.

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can be caused by a variety of things:

- ♥ Your long term health condition itself
- ♥ The treatment you are receiving
- ♥ The medication you are taking
- ♥ Hormonal changes
- ♥ Changes in appetite
- ♥ Changes in sleep
- ♥ The level of pain you experience
- ♥ Your blood count and haemoglobin
- ♥ Anaemia
- ♥ Psychological effects of your condition

It is important to note that there are a variety of reasons for fatigue and everyone experiences it differently.

Types of fatigue

Physical fatigue

🧡 reduced strength and energy

Mental fatigue

🧡 reduced memory and concentration

Emotional fatigue

🧡 feeling overwhelmed / emotionally exhausted

Volitional fatigue

🧡 lacking motivation to start / finish activities

Effects of fatigue

Fatigue affects everyone differently. Some people may have minimal symptoms and others will experience more severe fatigue.

If fatigue is interfering with your daily life and ability to manage your daily occupations, this can be very distressing.

It is helpful to discuss your fatigue with healthcare professionals involved in your care, particularly your Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist, as they can provide strategies to help you manage your fatigue.

Please feel free to request an Occupational Therapy assessment as the Occupational Therapist can provide you with one to one sessions to discuss your fatigue and put a management plan into place.

You may experience;

Physical changes

- ♥ Feeling slower
- ♥ Feeling 'bogged down'
- ♥ Having to rest for longer periods

Emotional changes

- ♥ Feeling frustrated
- ♥ Feeling overwhelmed
- ♥ Feeling like no one can understand your situation

Behavioural changes

- ♥ Restricting activity
- ♥ Reducing social interactions

Cognitive changes

- ♥ Not able to concentrate
- ♥ Not able to follow conversations / TV programmes / books
- ♥ Struggling with complex mental tasks

How can I manage my fatigue?

The rest of this leaflet is dedicated to providing you with strategies to help manage your fatigue.

We recommend you trial a variety of techniques to find something that works for you.

We will cover:

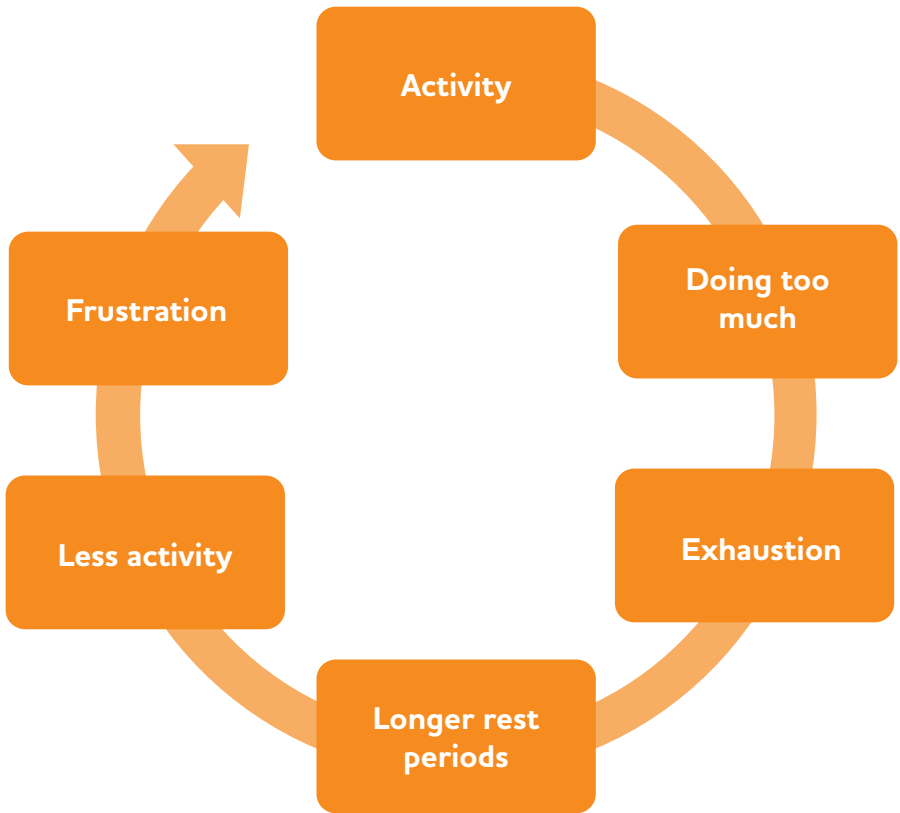
- ♥ Over activity cycle
- ♥ Balancing energy
- ♥ Planning, pacing and prioritising
- ♥ Sleep hygiene
- ♥ Rest and relaxation
- ♥ Exercise
- ♥ Environmental adaptations

The over activity cycle

Fatigue levels can often vary from day to day and some days you will have more energy than others.

On a day when you feel more energised, it can be tempting to make the most of it and try to get as many activities completed as you can.

However, this can lead to increased feelings of tiredness, with longer recovery times. Over time this will result in reduced activity and increased feelings of fatigue. This is known as the over activity cycle:

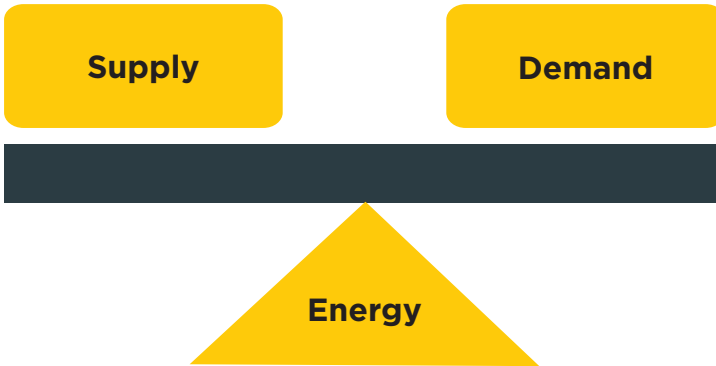


Balance is important

It can be useful to think of your body as an energy bank and apply the principle of supply and demand.

You need to ensure that you replenish your energy bank with a good diet, rest, relaxation, exercise and activities that you enjoy.

This will ensure that you have adequate energy to complete your activities throughout the day.



Planning; keeping a fatigue diary

To help manage your fatigue it is useful to plan your activities over the course of a week.

To help you do this it is a good idea to keep a fatigue diary for a week or two; you can then use this to better plan your days.

Over the course of a week, write down all the activities you complete and then colour code them in terms of how much energy they used:

- ♥ Green; some fatigue but recovered quickly
- ♥ Orange; moderate fatigue with moderate recovery time
- ♥ Red; severe fatigue with significant recovery time

Make a note of what time of day you tend to have most energy, whether this be morning or evening. Once you have done this for a week you will get a visual representation of how much energy you expend each day and can use this to manage your energy more effectively. Use the information about your energy levels over the week to plan your next week.

Tips for planning effectively:

- ♥ Do not complete all your red activities on one day
- ♥ Spread the red and orange activities throughout the week
- ♥ Intersperse green activities throughout
- ♥ Ensure that you consider how much mental and emotional energy is expended in each task as well as physical energy
- ♥ Spread your cognitively demanding tasks throughout the week as well
- ♥ Most importantly; remember to reserve energy for tasks that you find improve your mood and wellbeing, as well as those tasks you feel you need to do

Prioritising

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ♥ Do I need to complete this activity today?
- ♥ Can I do it another day?
- ♥ Can I complete a portion of it now and continue at another time?
- ♥ Can I delegate it to someone else?

It can be difficult or upsetting to think about delegating tasks to others. We understand that it can make you feel uncomfortable or guilty.

However, if you delegate some tasks, it will leave you with more energy for your important, replenishing activities. It will also allow you to avoid the over activity cycle. Ensure that you prioritise some periods of rest as well. This does not necessarily mean taking a nap (as this will disrupt your sleep pattern), but rather completing activities that replenish your energy and wellbeing. We will discuss this more later.

Pacing

It can be useful to break activities into chunks in order to preserve energy. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- ♥ Time: break the activity down into small chunks. Complete a task for 10 minutes and then rest. Slowly increase the time you complete activities.
- ♥ Distance: when completing activities that require walking for example, walk a short distance and slowly increase the distance over time.
- ♥ Speed: take your time when completing tasks; the faster you complete an activity the more energy you will use. Start off gradually and build your speed over time.
- ♥ Complexity: this relates to mentally fatiguing tasks. Try to break them down into small chunks and then rest in between.

Remember to build rest breaks into your pacing plan.

Sleep

Good sleep hygiene is an important part of fatigue management. You need to ensure you get regular, good quality sleep.

The following tips will help:

- ♥ Develop a routine of getting up and going to bed at the same time, even if you have had poor sleep
- ♥ Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and alcohol before bed
- ♥ Keep your bedroom well ventilated and at a comfortable temperature
- ♥ Avoid electronic devices such as tablets, phones and TVs for one hour before bed
- ♥ Remove these devices from the bedroom
- ♥ Keep a 'worry book' by the bed for writing down any distracting thoughts at night when you are trying to sleep
- ♥ If you cannot sleep then get out of bed and complete another activity; return to bed when you feel tired

Rest and relaxation

These are important for helping to replenish your energy.

It does not mean, however, that you should take naps throughout the day. Naps during the day disrupt your ability to sleep at night.

It can be useful to complete meditation or mindfulness exercises to help you relax. There are a variety of applications for smart phones which provide mindfulness activities as well as demonstrating deep breathing and muscle relaxation techniques.

It would also be helpful to have a chat with one of our Complementary Therapists who have a variety of techniques that can assist with relaxation.

Make sure that you have a period of rest and relaxation each day to replenish your energy.

Replenishing activities

As mentioned earlier, another important part of relaxation is completing replenishing activities.

These are any activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing; listening to music, gardening, knitting, seeing friends, it could be anything and will be different for each person.

Taking part in these activities helps to reduce emotional fatigue and improve your quality of life. It is important to build these replenishing activities into your daily routine, as well as completing the tasks you feel you have to complete.

Exercise

Low activity levels result in deconditioning of our muscles, which in turn leads to stamina and fitness levels being reduced.

This means that our everyday activities then feel physically more demanding and use more energy, therefore increasing fatigue. Therefore taking regular exercise and maintaining your fitness helps to reduce fatigue. It will also help with improving your sleep and mental well-being, as endorphins are released when we exercise.

The Department of Health recommends 2.5 hours of moderate intensity exercise in a week. Start slowly and build your activity over time.

Don't be put off by worries that exercising will increase fatigue, this will reduce over time as your stamina improves.

Equipment

Equipment can be useful to assist with fatigue management:

- ♥ Perching stools to sit down on whilst preparing meals
- ♥ Shower stools to sit down on whilst washing and dressing
- ♥ Long handled aids to reduce bending / stretching
- ♥ Wheeled trollies to move heavy items around the kitchen / living room
- ♥ Wheelchairs to conserve energy during travel so that you can enjoy your planned activity more when you arrive

This is a small selection of the available equipment; please speak to your Occupational Therapist for more information.

We appreciate that it can be difficult to accept equipment for a variety of reasons but do consider that by having some small pieces of equipment, your energy can be conserved and your independence increased.

Top energy management tips

- ♥ Sit down to complete activities if possible
- ♥ Keep the environment cool
- ♥ Use machinery to lighten the task e.g. electric toothbrush, kitchen whisk
- ♥ Ensure you are well prepared with everything you need to complete a task close by, to avoid reaching and bending
- ♥ Organise areas of the house well for their purpose e.g. keep all the items required to make a cup of tea in the cupboard above the kettle
- ♥ Maintain good posture when sitting / standing
- ♥ Plan ahead with meals; prepare some frozen batch meals for days when you are feeling more fatigued / consider using ready meals
- ♥ Consider equipment such as a perching stool / toileting equipment
- ♥ Consider a walking aid / wheelchair to conserve energy during travel
- ♥ Remember to include periods of rest and relaxation in your day

About Saint Francis Hospice

Saint Francis Hospice provides care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to local people affected by life-limiting illnesses. As a registered charity, we rely on the financial support of our community to keep providing world class care free of charge to individuals and their families. Every year, we provide treatment, care and support to more than 4,000 local people affected by a life-limiting illness.

Confidentiality

At Saint Francis Hospice we are committed to upholding your rights to confidentiality and protecting your privacy. We will treat your information with respect. Keep it secure and comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 including GDPR. Our privacy notice is available on request or by visiting our website www.sfh.org.uk

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