

Fatigue

Brain injury survivors commonly experience difficulty with fatigue following their injury and long term, with the incidence ranging between 21-73%.

What is Fatigue?

- *Difficulty initiating and/or sustaining attention to tasks and physical activities.*
- *A feeling of exhaustion, tiredness, weariness, or lack of energy.*

Types of Fatigue

Physical—Feeling physically tired, having low energy, or “dragging”. Associated with muscle weakness, damage to parts of the brain (e.g., basal ganglia, reticular activation system), or medical conditions (e.g., insomnia or sleep apnea).

Mental—Difficulty staying focused for long periods of time, brain “goes blank”. Associated with the extra effort the brain uses after TBI to complete the same tasks.

Psychological—Low motivation, weariness, or feeling “worn out”. Associated with depression, anxiety, and other types of stress.

What Can I Do About Fatigue?

Physical

- Get adequate rest.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and caffeine.
- Resume physical activity gradually *while also* getting adequate exercise.

Mental

- Take frequent breaks when working on activities.
- Develop strategies for managing time—e.g., checklists, calendars.
- Resume mental activities gradually beginning with most familiar tasks.
- Do not overschedule activities, tasks, or visitors.

Psychological

- Work on developing a routine to combat low motivation.
- Enlist family members to provide encouragement.
- Engage in enjoyable activities.
- Discuss your mood and motivation with your doctor.

Families and loved ones can assist by appreciating the impact of fatigue on a person's activity tolerance and scheduling breaks as needed in the daily routine to help recover.

What can my physician or healthcare provider assist with?

It is important to determine whether the fatigue is primary to the brain injury or secondary to another condition, such as depression, pain, sleep disorders, or neuroendocrine abnormality, which have all been associated with fatigue after brain injury.

Your physician/healthcare provider may want to review your current medications to determine if there is a side effect that can be reversed, or may run a series of laboratory tests to rule out additional health conditions.

For more information on fatigue, please visit:

<http://www.msctc.org/tbi/factsheets/Fatigue-And-Traumatic-Brain-Injury>

Reference: Zafonte R, Katz D, Zasler N. *Brain Injury Medicine, 2nd edition: Principles and Practice*. New York: Demos Medical; 2013.