

Fatigue Management During your Recovery

Many people experience fatigue, shortness of breath and/or lack of energy due to their health problems.

Saving energy in daily activities means changing the way you do things to make better use of your energy. When this is applied to daily tasks, it may allow you to do both the things you have to do and those that you enjoy.

If you find that fatigue is keeping you from doing things you want to do in your life, energy conservation techniques may be able to help you. Keep in mind that not every technique will work for you. These are suggestions you can use and adapt to find the right fit for you.

This information is intended as a general guide only. Please speak to your allied health worker, nurse or doctor if you have any questions or need help to manage your energy levels.

Prioritise

- > Identify which activities are most important to you. What needs to be done today, and what can be done later
- > When you have more than 1 thing to do, begin with the most important task, to make sure it gets done
- > Do more difficult tasks when you know you will have the most energy
- > Eliminate any tasks or activities that aren't important to you

Plan

- > Plan activities over the week to avoid doing too much in 1 day
- > Plan your day around your energy levels, be aware of what parts of the day you have less energy and avoid difficult tasks or rest during those times
- > Alternate easy and difficult tasks and heavy and light tasks
- > Gather all the supplies you need for a task prior to starting to avoid needing to look for them when you are doing the task
- > Set up the work area so you do not have to move around a lot looking for items
- > Keep items that are used a lot in easy to reach places
- > Eliminate any unnecessary tasks

Pace

- > Balance activity and rest. If you get tired stop and rest for 15 minutes whether you have finished the task or not
- > Do not try and finish a whole task in 1 session if it is difficult or you are becoming tired. Break it into smaller steps
- > Maintain a slow and steady pace, do not rush
- > Take regular breaks, rest often before you feel tired
- > Avoid holding your breath, practice breathing slow and steady.
- > Listen to your body and know your limits



Posture

- > Sit to complete task rather than standing. Sitting uses 25% less energy than standing.
- > Maintain an upright and symmetrical posture, this helps more oxygen to enter the lungs
- > Avoid excessive twisting, reaching and bending.
- > Store frequently used items between hip and shoulder level
- > Store heavier items closer to the floor and lighter items up higher
- > Adjust the work space to meet the posture demands of the task
- > Push rather than pull, pull rather than lift
- > If you must lift an item, lift using your legs, not back, and use both hands and carry close to your body

Personal Care

- > Use a shower chair or bath bench when showering, drying and dressing
- > Use long handled aids eg bath sponge, sock aid, shoe horn, pick up stick
- > Use warm water and have exhaust fan on to avoid build up of steam
- > Use a terry bathrobe to dry instead of a towel
- > Wear clothes that easy to put on and take off eg elastic waists
- > Use a shower caddy set at chest height to store soap, shampoo, toothbrush etc.

Cooking

- > Cook simple recipes and recipes that use less effort to prepare eg no stirring, use slow cooker
- > Use lightweight equipment eg plastic plates and cups
- > Use non slip mats under items to provide stability
- > Keep frequently used items eg tea and coffee supplies on the benchtop
- > Gather all items required into workspace prior to starting
- > Use a kitchen stool to sit rather than standing for long periods or sit at the dining table to prepare ingredients
- > Use pre-packaged items eg pre-cut or frozen vegetables
- > Slide heavy items rather than lifting eg slide saucepan
- > Use equipment to avoid lifting eg kettle tipper
- > Use electric appliances eg blenders, food processors
- > Consider using frozen meals or a meal delivery service
- > Let dishes soak instead of scrubbing
- > Air dry dishes on sink rather than drying with towel or use a dishwasher

Cleaning

- > Eliminate unnecessary cleaning
- > Line pans and bottom of oven with foil to catch spills
- > Allow plates etc to air dry and use straight from the drainer rather than packing them away
- > Break up the more demanding cleaning duties so that you are not doing them all on the same day.
- > Use long handled dustpans and cleaning sponges to avoid need for bending

Laundry/Ironing

- > Do more frequent smaller loads during the week
- > Use a top loading machine and pick up stick to get items out of machine
- > Use a clothes dryer, mounted at shoulder height on the wall if possible
- > Place laundry basket in a trolley to transport clothes to clothesline
- > Lower height of clothesline as much as possible
- > Hang smaller items on hangers while sitting, then place hanger on line
- > Wear clothes that do not require ironing
- > Sit to iron, adjust the height of the ironing board to a comfortable level
- > If possible leave the ironing board set up

Making the bed

- > Use a fitted sheet and a doona
- > Casters on the bed allow it to be moved more easily

Shopping

- > Bring a list of things you need to buy
- > Take a friend or relative with you to help.
- > Organise your shopping list by aisle or section
- > Use a shopping trolley rather than carrying groceries in a basket
- > Have shopping bags only half filled so they are not too heavy to lift
- > Avoid shopping during busy periods when shopping will take longer
- > Consider having groceries home delivered or “click and collect” services
- > Consider home delivery meal services or cook at home meal services

Childcare

- > Explain to your children/grandchildren that you are feeling tired and are unable to do as much as usual with them.
- > Plan activities that can be done sitting down.
- > Choose places where you are able to sit while the children play.
- > Avoid lifting and carrying children, use a pram or stroller to move them. Sit down and let them climb onto your lap if they want to be held.

Workplace

You may find that you cannot continue to work due to fatigue or that you have to reduce time spent at work. If you wish to keep working, talk to your employer about ways they can help you. If you would like help negotiating with your workplace there are government funded return-to-work providers who can help with this process. Workplaces may be able to consider:

- > Asking co-workers to be understanding and help you with some of your work.
- > Finding you lighter work tasks
- > Finding you a car park near your place of work.
- > Letting you take short breaks throughout the day.
- > Letting you to work from home if possible.

Sexuality

- > The physical effort required for sexual intercourse is about equal to climbing one flight of stair at a normal pace.
- > Because of this physical effort needed, it is important to have enough rest both before and while having sex. Plan to be sexually active at your best time of day if possible.
- > Choose positions that use less energy, for example, side-to-side position during intercourse is less tiring than the top-bottom position.
- > Have the more able-bodied partner assume a more active role.
- > Remember that simply touching, being touched and being close to your partner helps you feel special and loved.

Exercise

- > It is important to find your own balance between being active and getting plenty of rest.
- > Exercise will give some people more energy to do your daily tasks. The right type and amount of exercise can improve your oxygen intake and muscle strength.
- > Ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist.

Remember: Don't work harder, work smarter to save your energy for what you want to do.

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