Fatigue management

If you have physical or mental exhaustion, this could be fatigue – a feeling of deep tiredness that does not greatly improve with rest.

Conserving your energy will help manage fatigue and improve quality of life. An occupational therapist may have further ways to help you.

Fatigue is common in people living with Parkinson's. It impacts everyone differently, and for some is the most debilitating symptom.

Often bundled in with depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and apathy, fatigue is hard to tease out. It starts a cycle of inactivity that can reduce muscle strength and heart function and cause poor mental health.

Learning to manage fatigue by using your energy efficiently can help to overcome this cycle.

Causes of fatigue

The cause of fatigue in Parkinson's can be difficult to work out – sometimes it may be a direct symptom or a side-effect.

- **Motor symptoms** such as tremor, slowness of movement (bradykinesia), muscle stiffness and involuntary movements (dyskinesia) can all make muscle fatigue worse.
- **Medication side-effects**, dosing, timing and wearing off are other factors that may cause fatigue and daytime sleepiness. Sleep disturbance also adds to daytime fatigue.
- **Some medications** may trigger fatigue, particularly benzodiazepines, muscle relaxants, or anticholinergics.
- Other **medical disorders** may also contribute to fatigue and should be investigated with your treating professional, e.g. thyroid, vitamin or hormonal issues.

See your GP to discuss changes to your medication or make necessary lifestyle changes.

Ways to conserve energy

If fatigue is difficult to treat medically, it is important to maximise your energy use. Remember that people with Parkinson's only have so many teaspoons of energy each day. Decide where and when to use your teaspoons up to make your days more manageable.

Plan ahead

- Write a to do list and spread your activities throughout the day or week
- Consider what activities are the most tiring and plan when best to do them
- Finish the most important things when you have the most energy
- Time important actions with your medication schedule so you finish during 'on' times (when your medication is most effective)
- Schedule time for short naps to recharge your energy
- Work out if you can do an activity in a different way that requires less energy
- Reduce tiring movements such as bending, reaching and lifting
- Share household tasks with others.

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Pace yourself

- Allow time to complete activities
- Use 'off' periods to rest
- Divide big actions into smaller tasks
- Shift between heavy and light tasks
- Do not ignore feelings of fatigue.

Helpful aids and equipment

- Using a shower chair helps prevent unnecessary waste of energy from the legs and balancing in the shower.
- Aids such as a long-handled shoehorn or back/toe washer can help prevent high energy movements such as bending and reaching.
- Labelling cabinets and drawers could alleviate some cognitive fatigue.

Exercise and diet

- Stay well-hydrated
- Eat a healthy (plenty of fruits and vegetables) and balanced diet
- Eat foods with a low glycaemic index (low GI) to provide longer lasting energy.

Exercise during 'on' periods

- Exercise in the morning to get most use of your baseline dopamine
- Physical activity builds strength and stamina to overcome fatigue.
- It is important to get a care team together early. Look to doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, dietitians, social workers, and specialist nurses.

Remember: Most Parkinson's symptoms can be reduced with a combination of lifestyle changes including exercise, nutrition, medication on time, drinking plenty of water and good sleep habits.

References

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