

Fatigue - Tiredness

It is a natural reaction of your body to feel or be tired during and after illness of any kind. After a stroke, at some point almost everyone complains of feeling tired. At first, being tired is understandable:

- You are recovering from your stroke and learning to do things differently
- You may have hours of rehabilitation therapy every day
- You are in a new place and sleeping in a strange bed
- Your daily activities may take place at a time that is different from what you are used to
- You may be woken at night as part of your medical care. It is no wonder you feel tired.

While fatigue is common, it is also true that after a few months you will probably start feeling less tired. However, for some people, tiredness may continue for many years after a stroke. There are various reasons why you feel so tired and a number of things you can do about it.

What causes tiredness?

There are three major reasons why you may feel tired:

- **You have less energy than before.** This can be because of sleeping poorly, not getting enough exercise, poor nutrition, or as a side-effect of medication. It is important that you see your doctor in case you need to change the medication you are currently on
- **You have as much energy as before, but you are using more energy.** Because of the effects of your stroke, many things – like dressing, talking or walking – take a lot more effort. You have to stay ‘on alert’ all the time – and this takes energy. When your body is healing it can take a lot of energy just to do those everyday tasks we take for granted when we are well
- **You also may feel tired more from emotional than physical reasons.** Depression is common after a stroke and any serious illness, and it is not because of ‘brain damage’. Loss of energy, interest or enthusiasm often occurs along with a depressed mood.

Your tiredness may result from one or more of these reasons. It is important to find out which ones are affecting you. When you know that, you can think of what you need to do.

How can I get over feeling tired?

- ✓ **Tell your doctor how you feel and make sure you have had an up-to-date physical.** Besides evaluating any medical reasons for your tiredness, your doctor also may check to see if your fatigue could be a side effect of your medication
- ✓ **Plan your days to fit your energy level.** Do 'big' tasks when your energy level is at its highest
- ✓ **Set a daily routine.** Doing things systematically will save your energy, because better organisation may avoid extra motion. Go to bed at the same time each day
- ✓ **Set priorities.** Spend your energy on the most important activities. If you waste all your energy on little things, you will not have anything to show for your time
- ✓ **Use your energy wisely.** Take it easy when you can. If it is easier to walk with a stick, then use one. Be kind to yourself
- ✓ **Ask for help when you need it.** Be wise in getting help from others, especially with small tasks
- ✓ **Try naps, or schedule rest periods throughout the day.** Rest as long as you need to feel refreshed. For some people this will improve their energy levels, for others it will make it harder to sleep at night. Experiment with varying lengths and different times of the day for your naps
- ✓ **Learn to relax.** Sometimes the harder you try to do something the harder it is to do, which can cause tension, anxiety and frustration. All this takes more energy. Being relaxed lets you use your energy more efficiently. You could try breathing exercises, meditation, listening to soothing music or talking to someone you trust and letting go of your anxieties. Ask your GP or one of our Field Officers if they are able to recommend someone to help teach you how to relax, it does not come naturally to everyone
- ✓ **Every day do something you enjoy.** A positive attitude, outlook or experience helps enormously in boosting energy levels. Boredom is a very common trigger for feelings of tiredness. Pick up your old hobbies or try a new one and do a little every day
- ✓ **Treat yourself.** When you have achieved a new goal, give yourself a small reward, then reset your goal
- ✓ **Ask our Field Officers.** Ask our Field Officers how to get through this period of your recovery.

REMEMBER – recovering from a stroke is often a long, slow process. Be kind to yourself. We all have our good and bad days. Try and see the good in each and every day. Set goals and remember to reward yourself when you have achieved them.

If you would like any further information about this topic or anything else in relation to your stroke please contact the Stroke Foundation on 0800 78 76 53 or visit our website www.stroke.org.nz

