



Fatigue & autoimmune diseases

Fatigue is being very tired, weary, and lacking energy. Often, it is a symptom of other health problems.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Feeling drained of energy.
- Feeling exhausted.
- Having a very hard time doing normal activities.
- Having low motivation.
- Feeling inadequate.
- Having low sex drive.

CAUSES

Causes that need medical care include anemia, depression, heart disease, and chronic fatigue syndrome (the fatigue lasts at least 6 months). Fatigue is also a common symptom of **autoimmune diseases**. These include diabetes, low thyroid, multiple sclerosis and lupus (the systemic type).

Other physical causes include lack of leisure activities or lack of sleep, poor diet, side effects from allergies, chemical sensitivities or drug or alcohol addiction, being in hot, humid conditions, and prolonged effects of the flu or a bad cold. The after-effects of having COVID-19 should also be considered.

Possible emotional causes are burnout, boredom and a major life change (e.g., divorce, retirement, etc.).

TREATMENT

Treatment for fatigue depends on the cause(s). Keep track of any other symptoms that occur with the fatigue. This helps find out both physical and emotional causes.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



With fatigue, are any signs & symptoms for a heart attack or stroke present? ([cdc.gov/heartdisease/women](https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/women) and [cdc.gov/stroke/signs_symptoms](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/signs_symptoms))

NO
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YES ➔

**GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE:
CALL 911**



With fatigue, are you lightheaded or do you feel like you are going to faint?

NO
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YES ➔

GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



With fatigue, do you also have these signs of hepatitis?

- The whites of your eyes and/or your skin look yellow.
- Dark urine. Stools are pale and clay-colored. Vomiting and nausea. Fever.
- Loss of appetite and/or weight loss. Pain in the abdomen.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR



With fatigue, do you have other signs of multiple sclerosis?

- Blurred vision, double vision, or the loss of vision in one eye.
- Bladder problems (infections, incontinence, urinating often).
- Feelings of pins and needles in the limbs.
- Muscle spasms; poor coordination.
- Mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety, euphoria.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR



With fatigue and weakness, do any of these signs of diabetes occur?

- Passing urine often. Abnormally increased thirst and hunger. Rapid weight loss or excessive weight gain.
- Extreme irritability or drowsiness. Nausea and vomiting.
- Itching and/or skin infections that don't clear up easily. Tingling, numbness, or pain in the arms and legs.
- Blurred vision.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR

CONTINUE IN NEXT COLUMN



With severe fatigue, do you have signs of mononucleosis?

- Fever.
- Sore throat. Swollen lymph glands in the neck area.
- Loss of appetite. Pain in the upper left abdomen.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR



With fatigue, do you have signs of hypothyroidism?

- Hair loss and dry, thick, flaky skin.
- Decreased tolerance to cold temperatures and numbness or tingling in the hands.
- Unexplained weight gain.
- Constipation.
- Sleepiness; feeling mentally sluggish.
- Longer and heavier menstrual periods.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR



With fatigue, do you have any of these signs and symptoms of lupus?

- Joint pain lasts more than 3 months.
- Fingers get pale, numb, or uncomfortable in the cold.
- Mouth sores last more than 2 weeks.
- Blood tests show low blood count, low white cell count, or low platelet count.
- A "butterfly-shaped" rash on your cheeks lasts more than 1 month. Skin rash (raised patches with scaling) after being in the sun.
- Pain lasts more than 2 days when taking deep breaths.

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR



With fatigue and weakness, do you have signs and symptoms of anemia?

NO
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YES ➔

SEE DOCTOR

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE



TRIAGE QUESTIONS, *Continued*



With fatigue, do you have other signs and symptoms of depression?

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Has the fatigue lasted 6 or more months in a row?

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



With daytime fatigue, has someone else told you that you snore loudly and have episodes where your breathing has stopped 10 or more seconds at a time when you sleep?

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



With extreme fatigue, do you have signs of fibromyalgia?

- Tender points on the body.
- Trouble sleeping. Morning stiffness. Headaches.
- Painful menstrual periods.
- Tingling or numbness in hands and feet.
- Problems with thinking and memory.

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do any of these conditions describe the fatigue?

- It occurred for no apparent reason, lasted for more than 2 weeks, and has kept you from doing your usual activities.
- It started after taking medicine.
- It hits hard right before or after each menstrual period.
- Pregnancy is possible.

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Did the fatigue come with the onset of menopause or follow menopause?

NO **YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

If fatigue is due to a medical condition, follow your doctor's or health care provider's guidelines for rest, diet, medication, etc.

- **Get regular physical activity.** Exercise can give you more energy, especially if you sit all day at work. Exercise can calm you, too.
- **Cool off.** Working or playing in hot weather can drag you down. Rest in a cool, dry place as often as you can. Drink plenty of water.
- **Rest and relax.** Get a good night's sleep. Relax during the day if you can, too. Practice deep breathing or meditation.
- **Change your routine.** Do something interesting each day. If you do too much, plan for some quiet time.
- **Do something for yourself.** Plan time to do things that meet only your needs.

- **Avoid too much caffeine and alcohol.** Don't use illegal drugs. These trigger fatigue.
- **Eat well.** Eating too much and "crash dieting" are both hard on your body. Don't skip breakfast. Limit high-fat and/or rich, sugary foods. Eat whole-grain breads and cereals, and fruits and vegetables every day. Have 5 to 6 light meals a day, instead of 3 large ones. Take vitamin and mineral supplements, as advised by your doctor.
- **Lighten your work load.** Assign tasks to others when you can. Ask for help when you need it.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS)
cfidselfhelp.org