
Wellbeing

Top tips for fighting fatigue

by AMANDA WALLIS

Feeling fatigued? You're not the only one. Our work and home routines have been transformed by various stages of lockdown and upheaval. It might seem paradoxical that, for those of us who are objectively doing less, our fatigue is nevertheless increasing. But the true picture is much more complex.

Many of us are spending more time than ever on our laptops. When we are not on our laptops, we are on our phones scrolling email. We are on our tablets video-calling friends and family. We are watching TV to unwind. Screens, screens, and more screens. In addition to fatigue, this can lead to psychological disconnection, eye strain, and muscle pain.

We are also more sedentary than ever with limited physical activity throughout the working day. Some of us may be experiencing sleeplessness as our use of blue-light emitting devices encroaches closer and closer to bedtime. Others are suffering from the exhausting and unrelenting crush of anxiety and stress. Our schedules are irregular, our stress response is elevated, and our bodies are suffering.

The good news? There are a number of evidence-based strategies you can try to manage your fatigue.

1. LABEL AND UNDERSTAND FATIGUE

For a lot of people, fatigue isn't the product of not having had a good night's sleep. It is a complex interplay of lifestyle and cognitive factors that even the world's best sleep cannot fix. When you recognise and label this, you can start to take steps to manage it. Try not to ruminate on how bad you feel and, instead, be proactive with some of the tips below.

2. MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Fatigue is a common result of prolonged stress, so it is not surprising that we are seeing a surge in tiredness while we grapple with the global situation. Reducing your stress helps to tackle the root cause of fatigue, so take the time to engage in strategies that work for you: whether that's yoga, meditation, or connecting with friends. For more ideas, check out our recent piece on looking after your mental health in response to the pandemic.

3. PRACTISE SLEEP HYGIENE

Even if sleep might not "fix" fatigue for everyone, getting enough quality sleep is the cornerstone to fighting fatigue. Try to practise good sleep hygiene by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, cutting back on daytime naps, and limiting your blue-light screen time in the hour or two before bedtime.



4. MAINTAIN STRUCTURE

Sometimes fatigue occurs when our bodies become sensitive to too little activity. Keep up a structure in your day full of things to keep your mind and body engaged and active. As Dr Sarita Robinson and John Leach aptly put it: “[Structure] helps prevent a buildup of ‘empty’ time that could make you very aware of confinement, and cause a growing sense of ‘drift’. This can make people feel withdrawn and apathetic, sleep badly and neglect their personal hygiene.”

5. CONSIDER WHAT FUEL YOUR BODY NEEDS

Alcohol and caffeine are notorious culprits for fatigue because of the way that they interfere with the quality of our sleep as well as our hour-to-hour energy levels. Keep an eye on how much of these you are consuming and focus on staying hydrated and well-fed with water and nutritious foods instead.

6. GET OUTSIDE AND GET ACTIVE

Take the opportunity to get outside at least once a day and stretch your legs. Regular low-intensity exercise can increase our energy and decrease fatigue, as well as various other physical and mental benefits. For more on this, read our recent piece on the importance of getting outside.

7. TAKE BREAKS

Reduce tension and stress by taking regular breaks during the working day. These can refresh your mind and body and offer variety into your day that will reduce the fatigue you feel at the end of the day. For a handy reminder to look away from your computer every so often, we recommend downloading the Pomy widget.

It is important to realise not all of the strategies above will work, or are needed, for everyone. The best thing you can do is be responsive to what your body needs and take the steps to implement changes. Remember to show yourself compassion as you make these changes; we are all doing our best.

If your fatigue is persistent, it may be a symptom of an underlying medical condition. Don't hesitate to seek medical attention from your GP.