

Recovery After Stroke: Managing Fatigue

Feeling tired is a common complaint after a stroke. About 30-70% of survivors suffer from fatigue. It can be frustrating and can slow down recovery. It can even affect those who are doing well after stroke.

Fatigue and Health Issues

Stroke-related health issues can really sap your strength or energy. Examples include:

- Heart disease
- Infections caused by not being able to move (such as pneumonia)
- Problems with your bladder or bowel movements
- Weight loss caused by changes in eating habits, poor appetite, or swallowing trouble
- Depression or extreme sadness
- Chronic pain
- Muscle weakness or paralysis

Medicines and other treatments may help. They can improve problems with depression or pain, which may increase your energy level. But, some drugs that treat stroke-related issues can have side effects that leave you feeling tired and worn out. Ask your doctor to explain the side effects of any drugs.

Rev Up with Rehabilitation

Tasks that once were simple – sitting up, standing and walking – now require more physical and mental effort. Doing these things can tire you.

Working with a physical therapist (PT) or an occupational therapist (OT) may help. They can teach you:

- Ways to conserve energy
- Exercises to build stamina
- How to move more efficiently

Through rehab, you relearn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. You also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. As you regain some of your independence, you may also regain some of your energy.

As your physical condition and health issues improve, fatigue will be less of a problem.

What Can Help

- Ask your doctor and therapists how to keep or regain your energy.
- Know that fatigue is a genuine symptom after stroke; you will tire more easily.
- Don't overdo it. Plan rest time.
- Find out what exercises, foods or habits can help restore your strength.
- Try not to spend too much time in bed. Lots of bed rest can result in loss of muscle strength.
- The sudden change in blood pressure when you stand up can make you dizzy. Be sure to stand up or get out of bed slowly.
- Get information on stroke recovery from National Stroke Association. Visit www.stroke.org or call 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537).

- Contact your local stroke association.
- Join a stroke support group. Other survivors will understand your issues, and offer support and ideas to help you manage fatigue.
- Speak openly and honestly with your caregivers about your fatigue. They'll be glad you did, and together you can work out the best solution.

Professionals Who Can Help

- A general physician or doctor.
- Psychiatrist, a doctor who specializes in physical medicine and rehab.
- Occupational therapist, who helps stroke survivors manage daily tasks.
- Physical therapist, who treats problems with moving, balance and coordination.

Rehabilitation is a lifetime commitment and an important part of recovering from a stroke. Through rehabilitation, you relearn basic skills such as talking, eating, dressing and walking. Rehabilitation can also improve your strength, flexibility and endurance. The goal is to regain as much independence as possible.

Remember to ask your doctor, “Where am I on my stroke recovery journey?”

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available medical information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctors about any personal medical concerns.