



# How to Manage Fatigue

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## This guide will help you understand:

- What is fatigue?
- What causes fatigue?
- What can I do to manage fatigue?
- When should I talk to my healthcare team?

This guide is written for people living with kidney disease and those who help care for them. It does not replace advice from your healthcare team (for example, your nephrologist, nurses, social worker, dietitian, pharmacist, psychologist, family doctor or other healthcare providers).

### What is Fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of being tired and having no energy that does not go away when you rest or sleep.

Fatigue can also make you feel:

- Weak, heavy, or slow;
- Worn out;
- Like you cannot think or remember things;
- Like you do not have the energy to see people or do activities.

Fatigue can come and go over time and can affect your daily life.

### What Causes Fatigue?

Fatigue is usually worse for people living with kidney disease. Your fatigue may be caused by a combination of things, such as:

- Not getting enough physical activity and exercise;

- Buildup of toxins in your body caused by kidney disease;
- Dialysis treatments;
- Some medications;
- Other health problems (for example, sleep apnea or severe low blood counts);
- Depression, anxiety, or emotional stress caused by kidney disease or other problems

## What Can I Do to Help Manage Fatigue?

Dealing with fatigue can be challenging. You may need to try different ways to try to improve or save your energy. You may need to be creative in how you plan and go about your day.

### TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR ENERGY

- Be as active as you can – exercise is a great way to improve your energy and lessen your fatigue – even everyday activities such as dressing, bathing and moving around the house can be exercise.
  - If you are unsure, ask your healthcare team about how to exercise safely.
- Improve Your Sleep
  - Getting good sleep is important for managing fatigue. If you have trouble sleeping, please go to [www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms](http://www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms) and read the Ontario Renal Network’s Sleep Problems Symptom Self-Management Guide for more tips that may help you improve your sleep.

### TIPS TO HELP SAVE YOUR ENERGY:

- Prioritize
  - Use your energy wisely to be able to do the things that are most important to you: Look at your day and determine when you have the most energy;
  - Think of “budgeting” your energy - decide what is most important to do and save your energy for those things;
  - Try not to waste energy doing things that are not important to you;
  - Ask family or friends to help take care of tiresome tasks, such as housework or shopping.

- Plan Ahead
  - Keep track of your fatigue in a journal or diary - you may notice that you have more energy at certain times of the day;
  - You might also notice that you are more tired after some activities than others;
  - Plan to do more tiresome activities at times when you have the most energy;
  - Include time in your day to rest before and after activities that tend to be tiresome;
  - Involve family or friends in tasks you enjoy to make them less tiring;
  - Arrange your home so that most activities can be done on one floor;
  - Organize your kitchen, bathroom, and other important spaces so that things you use often are within easy reach;
  - Place chairs around your house so you can sit while doing things, or sit and take a break when you need to (for example, at the top and bottom of stairs);
  - Plan activities or outings where you can sit down to rest as needed;
  - If you are getting dialysis, plan more of your activities on non-dialysis days;
  - If you are getting dialysis, plan activities that require more energy on days that you do not have dialysis.
- Pace
  - Do one activity at a time, without rushing;
  - Know and listen to your body, stop and rest before you get tired, even if you are in the middle of a task;
  - Rest between activities;
  - Spread out tiresome tasks like housework over a longer period of time.

#### **ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR:**

- Bathing and Showering
  - Sit down to bathe or shower with a bath chair or bath bench;
  - Mount a handheld shower within easy reach of the bench or chair;
  - Use a 2-in-1 shampoo and conditioner to save steps;
  - Keep shampoo, brushes, towels and other items in easy reach;
  - Use long-handled sponges and brushes to avoid bending and reaching;

- Wear a terry cloth bathrobe to dry off;
- Consider using smaller, lighter towels to dry your body and hair.
- Housekeeping
  - Break up housework into smaller tasks and spread them out;
  - Store important and/or heavy housekeeping items in easy reach;
  - Do housework sitting down if possible (for example, sit down to iron or prepare meals);
  - Drag, slide or use a cart to move heavy items instead of lifting them (for example, laundry loads, vacuum cleaner);
  - Keep a small trash can in each room;
  - Consider using a walker with a seat and basket to move smaller items around the house.
- Shopping
  - Organize your shopping list by aisle;
  - Use a grocery cart for support or walker with a basket;
  - Shop during less busy times;
  - Ask for help shopping, bringing your groceries to the car, and into your home;
  - Consider shopping online and having groceries delivered to your home.
- Preparing Meals
  - Store kitchen items close to where they are used;
  - Store heavier items in easy reach (for example, pots, pans, appliances);
  - Use pre-cut or pre-prepared foods when possible;
  - Soak dishes instead of scrubbing and let dishes air dry, or use a dishwasher;
  - Make double portions of food and freeze individual portions;
  - Consider ordering ready-prepared meals that can be delivered to your home.

## MANAGE STRESS AND EMOTIONS

- Talking to someone about your feelings can help your fatigue and energy levels.
- These tips may help you manage your stress:
  - Try to avoid unnecessary situations or triggers that cause you stress;
  - Get your mind off of things by doing something enjoyable (for example, playing games, regular exercise or activity, spending time with friends, reading, listening to audio books, and getting outside);
  - Think about positive things and changing things you can control;
  - Find support – you do not have to cope with your fatigue alone. You can find support in your community and through your healthcare team. Talk to your family doctor about your feelings, or ask your healthcare team to refer you to a:
    - Peer support
    - Family and/or friends
    - Social worker
    - Counsellor
    - Psychologist
    - Psychiatrist
    - Occupational therapist
    - Spiritual care provider
- There are additional ways to deal with anxiety and depression. For more information, please go to [www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms](http://www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms) and read the Ontario Renal Network's Anxiety and Depression Symptom Self-Management Guides for more tips.

## BE PATIENT – FEELING BETTER WILL TAKE TIME

- Recognize and celebrate what you achieve along the way;
- Sometimes even after trying all of these tips you may still feel fatigue;
- Be gentle and kind to yourself during difficult times.

## When Should I Talk to My Healthcare Team?

Your healthcare team wants to know about your fatigue. Your concerns and questions are important. Do not be afraid to share them. Being able to share how fatigue impacts your life can help the healthcare providers understand what you are experiencing.

## Where to get more information

For more information on this symptom, or for guides to help manage other symptoms, please visit [ontariorenalnetwork.ca/en/kidney-care-resources/clinical-tools/symptom-management/managing-your-symptoms](https://ontariorenalnetwork.ca/en/kidney-care-resources/clinical-tools/symptom-management/managing-your-symptoms)

The recommendations in this guide are based on published evidence and expert consensus.

Ontario Health (Ontario Renal Network) gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide. This document is designed to provide people living with kidney disease with information about fatigue. It is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a qualified health professional, nor is it intended to provide a comprehensive list of treatment options. As treatment options and standards are constantly evolving, we do not guarantee that the information in this document is current. Always speak with your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

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