



# How to Manage Fatigue

## This guide will help you understand:

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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, and family doctor).

## What is Fatigue?

**Fatigue is tiredness or lack of energy that lasts a long time and does not go away with rest or sleep.**

- Your fatigue can range from mild to severe and may come and go over time
- Fatigue can make you feel:
  - Very tired, weak, heavy, or slow
  - Worn out
  - Like you can't think or remember things
  - Like you don't have the energy to see people or do activities that you enjoy

## What Causes Fatigue?

Fatigue is common for people living with kidney disease. Many things can cause you to feel fatigue, for example:

- Buildup of toxins in your body caused by kidney disease
- Dialysis treatments
- Some medications
- Other health problems (for example, sleep apnea or severe anemia)
- Emotional distress caused by kidney disease or other problems
- Depression or anxiety
- Not getting enough physical activity and exercise

## 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 a bit creative in how you 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



**Always talk to your healthcare team about how to exercise safely**

### Tips to Save Your Energy:

Use your energy wisely in order to be able to do the things that are most important to you.



#### Prioritize

- Decide which activities are most important to you and save your energy for these activities
- Postpone or put off less important activities

#### Plan ahead

- Plan to be active, include time in your day to rest before and after activities
- Spread out tasks like housework over a longer period of time
- Ask family or friends to help you with things such as housework, shopping, and child or pet care
- Arrange your home so that most activities can be done on one floor
- Keep things you need often within easy reach
- 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

#### Pace

- Do one activity at a time, without rushing
- Stop and rest before you get tired, even if you are in the middle of a task
- Rest between activities

Keep track of your fatigue in a journal or diary—you may notice that you have more energy at certain times of the day

## Additional tips if you have very severe fatigue:

### Daily Living

- Sit down to bathe or shower with a bath chair or bath bench
- Wear a terry cloth bathrobe to dry off
- Place chairs in strategic places around your home so you can stop and rest (for example, at the top and bottom of the stairs)

### Housekeeping

- Do housework sitting down if possible (for example, sit down to iron)
- Drag or slide heavy items instead of lifting them
- Keep a small trash can in each room

### Shopping

- Organize your shopping list by aisle
- Use a grocery cart for support
- Shop during less busy times
- Ask for help bringing your groceries to the car
- Consider shopping online

### Preparing Meals

- Prepare meals sitting down
- Soak dishes instead of scrubbing and let dishes air dry
- Make double portions of food and freeze half

## Tips to Improve Your Sleep:

**Getting good sleep can give you more energy. Getting into a sleep routine where most or all of your sleep is at night can help make people feel better rested.**

These tips can help you improve your sleep routine:

### Morning

- Try to wake up at the same time every morning, even on weekends
- Open the curtains to let in light or go to a bright room after you wake up



### Daytime

- Napping for a long time, early in the morning, or near bedtime can make it difficult to sleep at night
- Try to get some exercise every day

### Evening

- Try not to eat large meals close to bedtime (for example, have a bigger meal for lunch and a lighter meal in the evening)
- Before going to bed, lower the lights and do a relaxing activity (such as reading, listening to music, taking a warm bath or shower). Try activities like prayer, meditation, or imagery.
- Turn off all screens, including computers, TV's, smartphones/ cell phones and tablets (such as iPads), at least one hour before going to bed
- Limit caffeine (for example, coffee, tea, cola, chocolate), alcohol, and smoking



### Bedtime

- Do not go to bed until you feel sleepy, no matter what time it is
  - Do not "try" to fall asleep
  - If you cannot fall asleep after 20 to 30 minutes, get out of bed and do a calm activity (for example, reading) until you feel sleepy and then go back to bed
- Make sure that the room you sleep in is quiet, very dark, and cool
  - Use a mattress and pillow that you find comfortable
  - Try a sound machine or a fan to block noise from inside or outside the house (white noise)
  - Try room-darkening blinds or curtains to make your room very dark
  - Turn off alerts and ringers on smartphones/ cell phones and tablets
  - Keep a notepad at your bedside so that if you wake up you can write down your thoughts or worries and return to sleep with a clearer mind

Talk to your doctor about problems that might disturb your sleep, including changes in your mood, anxiety, and stress.

## Manage Stress and Emotions

**Talking to someone about your feelings and doing activities to help with stress and anxiety can help your fatigue.**



These tips may help you manage your stress and negative emotions:

- Try to avoid situations that cause you stress
- Distract yourself by playing games or talking with friends
- Focus on positive things and things you can control
- Find support – you don't 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:**

- Social worker
- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist
- Occupational therapist
- Spiritual care provider



## Be Patient – Feeling Better Will Take Time

**Small changes can improve your fatigue over time.**

These tips can help you make changes:

- Listen to your body
- Start slowly and make changes one at a time
- Set easy, realistic goals
- 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 this difficult time.

## 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.

## Notes

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The 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 ask your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

## Need this information in an accessible format?

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