

Hepatitis C symptom #1:

Coping with fatigue



People with hepatitis C suffer from a range of different symptoms, including mouth ulcers, abdominal pain, itchy skin and nausea. However, there is one symptom that the majority of people with hepatitis C suffer from... and that is fatigue. In this article we look at what it is, where it comes from and how it can be managed.

“ I want to go out and do things, but I’m always too tired. ”

What is fatigue? In simple terms, it is tiredness. It can be described as lack of physical energy or stamina, sleepiness, muscle weariness, an inability to concentrate, trouble with memory, or ‘brain fog’. Fatigue is highly subjective, as more often than not, the severity of fatigue is measured by a person’s description of tiredness, rather than a test.

Fatigue can play a big part in people’s quality of life. It affects people’s abilities to do activities they normally enjoy, such as

going away for a weekend or spending time with family.

“ I don’t think my family understands why I’m always so tired. ”

It is often difficult to get others to understand fatigue. Share your personal experiences of fatigue in a way your loved ones can understand. It may help to compare it to the flu.

Many people with hepatitis C experience fatigue. But why? There are many theories out there but they all seem to disagree. Some researchers believe that the hepatitis C virus itself causes fatigue. They believe the increasing presence of the body’s cytokines (small proteins within the body that are a key part of the immune response) can lead to fatigue, in the same way a flu would. However, others believe fatigue is caused by factors that aren’t specifically related to the virus itself, such as depression, anxiety, drugs or alcohol.

“ My whole body feels like it’s made of lead. Sometimes I feel like I can’t physically get out of bed. ”

While there is disagreement on those areas, two causes of fatigue have been agreed on: people with cirrhosis and people taking interferon almost always suffer from fatigue. Other medications can also have side-effects that are similar to symptoms of fatigue. Whether fatigue is brought on by hepatitis C or not, it is important to check there are no other underlying medical issues or causes for fatigue.

“ I would have my interferon injections every Thursday night, so on Friday I started feeling the effects of it. Saturday was when I felt like a 90 year-old man. ”

Dealing with fatigue can be frustrating and requires patience. On page 15, we have provided some tips for dealing with fatigue.

Sources: www.webmd.com, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov, www.hcvadvocate.org.

Reduce your alcohol intake. Alcohol can make you feel tired. It is also bad for your liver health.



Include regular breaks in your day.



Take warm showers, rather than hot showers as hot temperatures can be draining.

Try to manage the stress in your life and, if possible, avoid stressful situations. Prioritise what needs to be focussed on at this stage, and what can be thought about later. Also prioritise your day by doing essential tasks first.



Don’t try to sleep when you feel fatigued, instead sit down and rest or do lighter, easier activities. You will regain more energy from these sorts of breaks.



Maintain an ideal bodyweight as obesity can be another cause of fatigue. Choose healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Foods high in fat, fried foods or processed foods can reduce your energy levels.

To do list

- 1 - Call Graham
- 2 - Organise payment
- 3 - Read magazine

Exercise is an important component of healthy living and can help increase your energy. It can also boost your mood. For many people with fatigue, the thought of exercising may seem unbearable. Try going for gentle walks. A study suggested people with hepatitis C who took 10,000 steps at least three days a week saw significant improvements in fatigue levels.



Work or do things at the time of day when you feel your best.

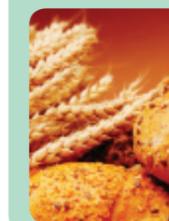
Side-effects from interferon are most intense for the first few days after the weekly injection. If you are continuing to work while on interferon, ensure your injections are done at the end of your working week so you have more time to recover.



Tips for dealing with fatigue



Have smaller more frequent meals during the day, rather than large heavy meals. Frequent meals give your body a regular supply of fuel.



Take time to relax. Try yoga, meditation or other relaxation techniques.



Stop smoking or reduce the amount you smoke. Smoking can zap your energy.

Improve your sleep health. If sleep patterns change, this can make someone develop chronic fatigue.

Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.

Don’t watch TV, text or read in bed.

Establish a pre-sleep routine.

Make sure your bed is in a dark, quiet, cool room.

Avoid caffeine or exercise late in the day.

Avoid having food before bed.

Don’t overload your day. Pace yourself. Some days you may feel fine, while other days you may find it difficult to get out of bed. Listen to your body and give yourself some down time if you need it.