

Managing fatigue after brain injury

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information and advice on how to manage the effects of fatigue after a brain injury.

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is an extreme tiredness experienced by everyone at some point after a period of physical or mental activity. It is a signal telling us to take a break. Some of the main ongoing symptoms after brain injury are tiredness, loss of physical stamina, and fatigue. They affect everything that a person does. Unlike 'normal' fatigue these symptoms are not always improved with rest alone.

What causes fatigue after brain injury?

Some of the suggested causes of fatigue after brain injury are:

- Damage of the brain stem which controls consciousness, wakefulness and the rhythm of sleeping.
- Inflammation of the nerves in the brain which happen following brain injury which can disrupt information processing and memory.
If these skills are affected then greater effort is needed in all mental and physical tasks leading to increased levels of fatigue.
- Post-concussion syndrome – collection of symptoms linked to mild head injury.

Triggers to fatigue

Activities which trigger fatigue will be different for everyone, for example:

- Working at a computer
- Going for a walk
- Being in a busy environment such as a shopping centre or restaurant
- Going to the gym

Reference No.

GHP11016_05_19

Department

Brain Injury

Review due

May 2022

**Patient
Information**

Managing fatigue

For some people fatigue improves over time. However for many people fatigue is a condition that they have to learn to manage. Often there is a tendency to try and return to the same levels of activity that were achieved before the brain injury. This can lead to a 'vicious cycle' of good and bad days.

Bad days

A 'bad day' is when there is very little activity but lots of rest to 'recover'. This can lead to a lower level of fitness and a lack of motivation.

Good days

A 'good day' is when a person feels better with the temptation to do all the things left undone during the bad day. As fitness is reduced this can lead to feeling worse and the need to rest again.

Pacing

Pacing means keeping to the same amount of activity each day; whether you are having a good or bad day. If everyday activities can be successfully paced using a 'little and often' approach then fitness is likely to improve over time.

Prioritising

It is important to prioritise activities to manage your energy levels. This will involve thinking about all of the activities that have to be done each day or week and considering the following:

- Which jobs are most important or essential?
- Which activities are most enjoyed?
- Which tasks could be delegated to someone else?
- Could any activities be done less often or stopped altogether?

Patient Information

Ways to assist in managing fatigue

- Balance activity and rest.
- Use energy saving techniques throughout the day (for example complete activities sitting down).
- Alternate between mental and physical activity.
- Get to know your triggers to fatigue.
- Get to know your energy limits on different activities.
- Work within your energy limits, do not wait until you feel you have gone too far.
- Pace activities throughout the week.
- If necessary only tackle 1 larger activity a day.
- Take regular rest breaks. If you need to sleep during the day try to have 30 minute 'power naps' and avoid sleeping after 4:00pm.
- Prioritise where to use your energy.
- Try to make sure that you have at least 8 hours sleep each night as this will help with your energy levels for the next day.
- Have a regular routine by going to bed at the same time each day and getting up at the same time.
- Exercise regularly within your physical capability.

Contact information

If you need any further information or advice please contact Gloucestershire Brain Injury Team.

Gloucestershire Brain Injury Team

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Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4:00pm

Content reviewed: May 2019