

# Understanding and Fighting Fatigue from MS

**Approximately 400,000 people in the U.S. have multiple sclerosis. Of that, 86% list fatigue as the number one symptom of their disease.**

## What Causes MS Fatigue?

The exact mechanism of MS fatigue is not known, but studies suggest that changes in the brain caused by MS may require persons with MS to use five times more effort to complete a simple task than a person without MS, especially if aggravated by stress, activity, fever, and heat exposure.

## How Can One Fight MS Fatigue?

MS fatigue is not just being tired — it is like having the flu without the other symptoms. Although MS fatigue is common and frustrating, there are things one can do to fight fatigue and increase energy.

### MEDITATION

- Guided meditation is a useful activity to manage fatigue.
- Tai chi and yoga are meditative and also provide good exercise.

### NUTRITION

- Most nutrition should be provided through the morning and noontime meals. Many times people with MS are too tired in the evening to eat hearty meals.
- Drinking plenty of liquids helps. Oftentimes an overactive bladder or difficulty with swallowing will cause people with MS to drink less than they should.
- A good rule is to eat plenty of whole foods such as fruits and veggies and avoid too many simple carbohydrates.
- Eating breakfast every day is an energy boost for low morning blood sugar.
- Low iron levels contribute to fatigue. Fish, eggs, fortified cereals and beans are high in iron and can fight fatigue.

### DEPRESSION

- Depression makes fatigue worse. As with any depression, treatment should be a first line of defense.
- Every anti-depressive medication has side effects, so the physician should be consulted if there are any side effects with a prescribed medication.

### EXERCISE/ACTIVITY

- Maintaining a regular exercise program will provide optimal energy.
- Stay out of the heat, use a cooling vest, and look for activities that keep one cool, like swimming.
- Rest between activities may not eliminate fatigue, but it certainly helps.



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365 Lake Street • Bristol, NH 03222

**(603) 217-0149**

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### PRIORITIZE

- Devise a daily plan on what needs to be done and organize tasks so that they are manageable.
- Avoid overexertion and delegate strenuous household work where possible.
- Allow 'time-off' between social occasions.
- Avoid tasks that require concentration/physical exertion in the afternoon.
- Simplify life activities and avoid stressful situations as much as possible.

### ASK FOR HELP

- Never feel bad when asking for help. Spend energy on what matters and bring in reinforcements for the other tasks. Consider help from friends or family, or join a support group.
- Consider a few hours a day of practical assistance from a professional caregiver who is trained in MS care. This can save energy sources from being drained the next day.

MS fatigue and other MS symptoms can be frustrating, but most people with MS do lead full and active lives. A professional in-home caregiver experienced in MS care such as at **Live Free Home Health Care** can help with interventions to fight MS fatigue. Contact **Live Free Home Health Care** for more information on how our in-home caregivers can make a person with MS feel enabled, motivated and connected to others.

*Sources: National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Ezine Articles, MS Gateway, Everyday Health*

