

WHAT CAN I DO?



- 1** Problems such as anaemia (low red blood levels) typically cause fatigue and can be treated with iron supplements often in the form of an iron infusion (drip). The dietician will advise on diet for anaemia.
- 2** A regular sleep pattern is helpful allowing time to wind down by reading, relaxing, having a bath/shower or perhaps listening to music. It would be advised to minimise day time sleeping. Power naps of 30 minutes are the most effective. When taking steroids it is advised that they are taken first thing in the morning as they can cause sleeplessness.
- 3** A balanced diet is recommended with guidance from the food pyramid unless otherwise advised. During a flare-up a low residue (low fibre diet) is often recommended to allow the bowel to rest. A review by a dietician would be advised regarding this diet. It would be important to avoid caffeine and alcohol in the evenings. Drinking enough water as well as other drinks would be advised during the day. Approximately eight small glasses of water a day is advised.
- 4** Surprisingly for some, getting more physically active by walking, swimming and exercise helps break the cycle of fatigue. Exercise is the most proven method of relieving fatigue. The more sedentary you are the less energy you will have for activities. Studies show that a cumulative effect of less day activity, more day time sleep and night waking are associated with higher fatigue levels. In summary: too much rest will decrease energy. It would be important to set realistic goals for you and not to overdo exercise. Exercise can be a planned activity and set at your own pace. A balance of rest and activity is recommended. It may be helpful to include family members.
- 5** Stress is often questioned as a cause for IBD. Stress alone does not cause IBD but may be an influencing factor in causing a flare-up. Stress and anxiety may contribute towards sleeplessness, increased energy demands and fatigue. Allocating time for relaxation and hobbies would be advised.

There is a whole range of symptoms which are associated with IBD. Fatigue is just one of the symptoms but it can cause a major impact on quality of life. You are advised to contact your specialist nurse or General Practitioner for further advice.

Fatigue in Inflammatory Bowel Disease





THE CAUSES OF FATIGUE ARE ASSOCIATED WITH A NUMBER OF FACTORS

Metabolic	Anaemia, diabetes, kidney and liver diseases
Infections	Tuberculosis, flu
Heart/Lung	Anaemia, heart failure, chronic obstructive airways disease
Medications	Steroids, sedatives, blood pressure tablets, antihistamines
Psychiatric	Anxiety, depression, alcohol/drug abuse
Sleep patterns	Insomnia, shift work, pregnancy
Other	Cancer, inflammatory conditions, chemotherapy

WHAT IS INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE?

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a chronic condition which affects approximately 15,000 people in Ireland. It is the umbrella term for ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease which are inflammatory conditions of the gastrointestinal tract and not to be confused with Irritable Bowel syndrome (IBS). IBD is an individual condition where a person can be well for a long time or have repeated flare-ups. There is no cure for IBD and treatment will vary from person to person. Depending on the symptoms and the condition, you can be affected physically as well as emotionally. The development of IBD is different for everybody.

WHAT IS FATIGUE?

Fatigue is a problem which is associated with chronic conditions and may be underestimated in young people with IBD. Fatigue is also called exhaustion, tiredness or lethargy. It can be defined as a feeling of lack of energy and motivation that can be physical, mental or both. 10% of us suffer at any one time from persistent tiredness but a good night's sleep corrects this. In chronic illness this is not the case and you may feel persistently tired despite sleep.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FATIGUE?

The symptoms of fatigue include weakness, lack of energy, constantly tired, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating and difficulty starting or finishing tasks. This can be very irritating and frustrating and can affect quality of life as well as coming to terms with a chronic condition. In IBD severe fatigue is a commonly reported symptom with 40% of people in remission reporting it as a troublesome symptom. You may feel you are being dismissed when you mention fatigue as a problem.

HOW CAN FATIGUE BE SOLVED?

Fatigue can be solved by good treatment management of the condition, good sleep and a change of lifestyle. This can be achieved by getting reviewed promptly when unwell or if having a flare-up. Hospitals which have a specialist nurse in IBD will advise you about your condition, medication and appropriate sources of further education such as web-sites and support groups. Most centres have a phone-in advice line and will provide information on the steps to take when you are unwell. It is important to write down symptoms and number of bowel motions per day so that the nurse can assess the severity of the flare-up. It is essential to understand the condition and how it affects you.



WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE?

FATIGUE IS A NORMAL RESULT OF

- Working
- Mental stress
- Overstimulation/under stimulation
- Jet lag
- Depression
- Boredom
- Disease
- Lack of sleep

