

Many people with Parkinson's disease (PD) experience fatigue. We do not know everything about this common symptom, but we do know that fatigue can have both mental and physical causes. In Parkinson's disease, the feeling of fatigue is hard to describe and even harder to measure. Fatigue can be caused by or made worse by slow movement, muscle stiffness, depression, changes in being able to move or sleep well, and even medications. It can also be experienced throughout the day or only when medications are wearing off.

- **Fatigue Due to Akinesia** - Akinesia, or trouble starting a movement, often feels like fatigue. A person with this symptom must move slowly and will find it hard to finish a task in a regular amount of time. Everyday tasks such as getting dressed can take a lot of effort.
 - **Helpful tip:** *Keep track of times during the day when akinesia is better and medications are working well. Energy consuming tasks can then be done at these times when movement is easier.*

- **Muscle Fatigue** - PD symptoms like muscle stiffness, cramping, tremor or shaking, and difficulty initiating a movement put stress on a person's muscles. To move with these symptoms, muscles have to work very hard and often against each other. With tremor, the constant shaking can quickly fatigue muscles. Muscles that do not move enough are not well-conditioned, and they can become reduced in size (atrophied). Loss of muscle strength decreases stamina and endurance. For many people, this decrease feels like fatigue.
 - **Helpful tip:** *Antiparkinson medications can be used to treat symptoms like tremor, which can cause fatigue. These medications must be carefully monitored to avoid a common side effect called dyskinesia (fidgety, involuntary movements), though, because dyskinesia can also cause fatigue. The only treatment available to keep muscles well-conditioned is a regular exercise program. People who have included exercise as a part of their daily routine have less fatigue!*

- **Fluctuations in Mobility** - Many people with Parkinson's disease have fluctuations in their mobility throughout the day. Typically these fluctuations follow the dosing cycle. In other words, individuals with PD experience an increase in symptoms at the end of a dose. It is also common to have the best relief from symptoms in the morning because this is when most people feel well rested.
 - **Helpful tip:** *Often, people try to get everything done in the morning when they feel well, but too much activity in the morning can lead to fatigue. Time your periods of activity for maximum mobility, but also pace yourself and allow for rest periods.*

- **Fatigue due to Depression** - Depression is common in people with Parkinson's disease. It occurs in about 40% of the patients. Fatigue is a typical symptom of depression and is often reported as a lack of motivation or a loss of energy.
 - **Helpful tip:** *Antidepressants are used to treat this problem. When successful, people begin to feel less tired and are more willing to participate fully in a day's activities.*

- **Fatigue due to Sleep Disturbance** - Parkinson's disease is often associated with sleep disturbance. Causes vary but may be due to sleep cycle changes, inability to get comfortable, or side effects of medications. Sleep disruption contributes to daytime sleepiness, and people often have a strong desire to nap throughout the day.
 - **Helpful tip:** *A short nap after lunch is healthy and refreshing, but frequent naps throughout the day will only make sleeping at night more difficult. Sleep problems should be evaluated by your doctor because it is well-known that a poorly rested person will perform poorly during the day. It is also important to note that some medications used to treat sleep disturbance may cause daytime fatigue.*

- **Fatigue due to Medications** - Dopamine agonists, such as Mirapex® and Requip®, can cause fatigue and daytime sleepiness.
 - *Reducing the medication may help; however, it can come at the cost of increased PD motor symptoms. Medications such as Provigil® and Ritalin® are being studied for combating fatigue in PD.*

WORKING WITH YOUR CLINICIAN TO MANAGE FATIGUE:

It is clear that fatigue is a problem for many people with Parkinson's disease. To get help, a complete health history and physical exam is first necessary to rule out non-Parkinson causes. Sometimes problems not associated with PD, such as anemia, are found.

If you are experiencing fatigue, ask yourself the following questions and record them in a notebook. Then bring this information to your next doctor's appointment and share it with your doctor:

- When do I feel fatigued?
- How long do my feelings of fatigue last each day?
- Does my fatigue fluctuate with my symptoms?
- Does my fatigue fluctuate with the time that I take my medications?
- On a scale of one to ten, how fatigued am I in the morning, around noon, and in the afternoon?

The answers to these questions can help you and your doctor work together to identify possible causes of the fatigue you are experiencing. If necessary, Parkinson's medications can be adjusted.

Some Steps People Can Take to Avoid Fatigue

- Eat well. Getting the right food is necessary for feeling strong.
- Participate in an exercise program with both aerobic (biking, swimming, walking, running) and stretching exercises.
- Practice good sleep habits! Establish a regular bedtime, avoid frequent napping or stimulation at bedtime, and decrease caffeine and alcohol intake.
- Keep mentally active. Boredom often leads to fatigue.
- Eat a lot of fiber and drink plenty of fluids to avoid constipation.
- Do more difficult daily tasks when movement is easier and medications are working well.
- Know your limitations and seek assistance when necessary. Forcing too many activities into one time period will cause fatigue.