

Fatigue

Fatigue is very common in Parkinson's disease (PD). Scientists estimate that at least 50% of people with the disease suffer from fatigue. It often precedes other symptoms and significantly impacts quality of life.

Description

Because it fluctuates, fatigue is hard to describe and even harder to measure accurately. Everyone experiences fatigue differently, and it isn't affected by how long a person has had the condition. How fatigue affects people varies from person to person, and some may find it very difficult to live with. Fatigue fluctuates throughout the day. You may feel energetic and capable of doing everyday tasks at certain times of the day, yet too tired to do much at others. This may correspond to the "off" period, for example before a new dose takes effect or after one wears off.

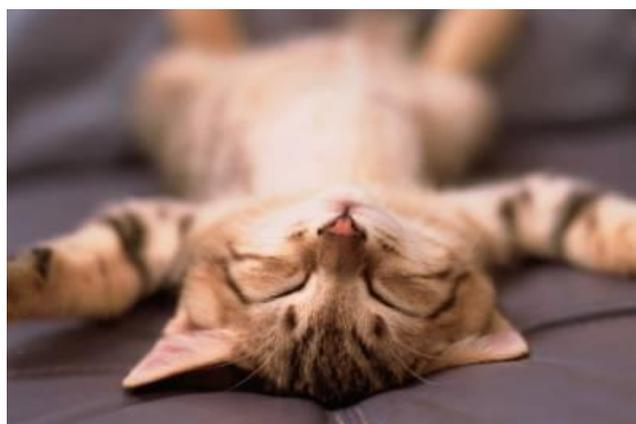
However, it is not well documented. James Parkinson (1817) mentioned the symptom in his original description of the disease, but it was only in 1993 that studies began to describe its prevalence, progression, impact and characteristics. Some scientists believe that fatigue is associated with PD and that it may be caused by low serotonin and dopamine levels in some areas of the brain. Serotonin is a chemical involved in certain behaviours, such as circadian rhythms, and mental disorders, such as stress, anxiety, phobias and depression.

Causes

Fatigue can be caused or aggravated by motor symptoms, like involuntary muscle contractions (dystonia), slowness of movement (bradykinesia), stiffness and tremors. These can force muscles to work harder and therefore fatigue quickly.

It's important to distinguish between mental and physical fatigue. With physical fatigue, you have less energy to do physical tasks, whereas mental fatigue impacts cognitive processes, making it difficult to concentrate, remember things or think. This may also be caused by side effects of medication.

Fatigue may also be caused by non-motor symptoms, such as sleep disorders, anxiety and depression



Sleep disorders include:

- Hypersomnia: characterized by feelings of excessive daytime sleepiness, or suddenly falling asleep in severe cases.
- Insomnia: characterized by trouble falling or staying asleep.
- REM sleep behaviour disorder: REM sleep is the stage of sleep in which most dreaming occurs. People who suffer from the disorder move around while sleeping and act out their dreams.

Hypersomnia can cause excessive daytime sleepiness, which is dangerous when driving. Hypersomnia can be a side effect of dopamine agonists, and you should talk to your doctor as soon as the first symptoms appear so that your medication can be adjusted.

Fatigue can also be caused by other medical conditions, such as diabetes and anemia.

Managing Fatigue

An overall approach with input from your doctor is beneficial in managing fatigue and improving quality of life.

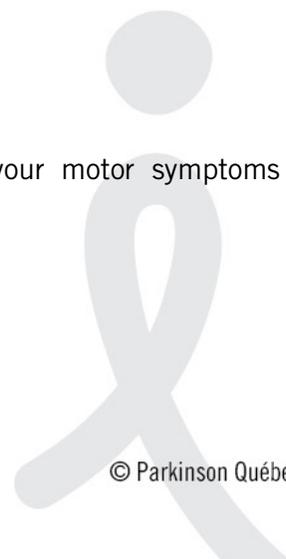
Consult your neurologist

- It's important to treat depression, sleep disorders and other medical conditions first.
- If necessary, adjust your medication to prevent “off” times, enabling you to reduce your motor and non-motor symptoms and conserve your energy for your everyday tasks.

Keep a journal to record your feelings of fatigue in preparation for your next doctor's appointment. Describe when you feel fatigued: if the fatigue fluctuates with the time that you take your medications; if it fluctuates with your symptoms; its intensity; how long the feeling lasts.

Conserve and manage energy

- Do more difficult tasks when your medication is most effective and your motor symptoms are reduced.
- Rest when needed. A short nap after lunch may be beneficial.
- Find a balance between being active and resting.



Improve sleep

- Establish a nighttime routine.
- Relax before going to bed by taking a warm bath or meditating, for example.
- Avoid drinking stimulants in the evening.
- Adopt regular sleeping hours.

Ways to keep active and stay in shape

- Follow an exercise program approved by your doctor or physiotherapist. A combination of aerobic exercise (cycling, swimming or walking) and stretching can help increase your endurance.
- Keep your brain active. Boredom often contributes to fatigue.
- Eat healthy:
 - Well-balanced meals following Canada's Food Guide.
 - Eating small snacks often will provide a constant supply of glucose, which is used for energy.
 - Eat lots of fibre and drink lots of liquids. This will help to prevent constipation, which contributes to disturbed sleep and lethargy.

Fatigue can start a vicious cycle in which you become less and less active. Try to find a balance between regular physical activity and rest, and ask for assistance when necessary.

References

Fatigue and Parkinson's Information Sheet, Parkinson's UK :

https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/download/english/fs72_fatigueandparkinsons.pdf et *Fatigue and Parkinson's Disease, National Parkinson Foundation:* <http://www.parkinson.org/NationalParkinsonFoundation/files/fa/fa42a125-f612-415f-9bd2-9bbd115d2b03.pdf>

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