

Tired All the Time? Something Isn't Okay

Constant fatigue may point to an underlying health problem. If you are experiencing this, it's important to get professional help, writes **Saliha Nasline**

Feeling tired once in a way is fine. But if you are living with that feeling always, then it's time to shake yourself up and ask what's wrong. You are probably fatigued and that's more than tiredness. Sometimes, even unknown to you, it could be affecting your performance at work, your family life and social relationships. Fatigue can be a potential hazard for those working in certain industries. Tiredness is a common condition, felt by everyone at some point of time, but is usually resolved with a good night's sleep. However, despite getting adequate sleep, good nutrition and exercising regularly, if you still find it hard to perform everyday activities, concentrate or be motivated at your normal levels, you may be experiencing fatigue that needs further investigation.

TATT SYNDROME

"Fatigue is often described as lack of energy and motivation, both physically and mentally. Fatigue kicks in when tiredness is not relieved by enough sleep or rest," said Dr Jyothsna Krishnappa, senior consultant internal medicine at Bengaluru's Apollo Hospital. "There's something called Tired All the Time syndrome. If a person is feeling tired for more than two weeks, even after consuming a good amount of nutritious food, getting enough sleep and not overworked, he/she may be suffering from 'TATT' syndrome."

Tiredness is temporary but fatigue can last for six months or longer, she added.

Also, it can affect anyone, said Dr Manjeeta Nath Das, consultant internal medicine at Columbia Asia Hospital, Gurgaon.

WHY THE LOW ENERGY

Krishnappa said that there are numerous potential causes of fatigue. They range from those that cause poor blood supply to the body's tissues to illnesses that affect metabolism, from infections and inflammatory diseases to those that cause sleep disturbances.

There are also other factors that induce fatigue such as:

- Not sleeping enough
- Depression
- Lack of good nutritious food
- Diabetes (if sugars are high, they remain in the bloodstream instead of being used for energy, which makes one feel fatigued. Low blood sugar or glucose means the person may not have enough fuel for energy,

MENTAL HEALTH'S HIT

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Dr Manjeeta Nath Das, consultant internal medicine, Columbia Asia Hospital, Gurgaon

which can cause fatigue)

- Anaemia (iron deficiency anaemia is a common cause of fatigue in women)

In addition, according to Das, there could be medical causes due to an underlying illness, such as thyroid disorder or heart disease, too. Lifestyle-related causes involve ill-effects of alcohol or drugs or lack of regular exercise. Workplace stress can also lead to feelings of fatigue along with emotional causes arising out of mental health problems, such as depression.

Ushakiran Sisodia, head dietitian at Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital, Mumbai, said: "Working late at night and getting up late make you feel tired.

If you are undernourished, you get tired easily due to lack of having breakfast or being deficient in one or the other nutrient. Having low levels of haemoglobin and vitamin D3 also have a negative impact on your health. Stress and thinking too much also add to the major causes."

WATCH OUT FOR THESE

Fatigue can be physical or mental. Firstly, you look stressed out; in addition to low energy, you may have muscle pain, headache, dizziness, and recurrent cold and cough, at times. Irritable behaviour and mood swings are also present. Secondly, you are unable to do everyday chores, Sisodia said.

GO FOR A DIAGNOSIS

Fatigue has to be diagnosed as soon as possible because it could be a sign of major health problems such as hypothyroidism and heart disease.

sult a doctor as early as possible," advised Krishnappa.

Das said: "If one suffers from a constant lack of energy, it is time to check with a physician. If fatigue poses a series of negative effects on your quality of life, such as inability to perform daily tasks, lack of motivation or hallucinations, then consider speaking with a health professional. Your doctor might suggest certain medical tests if he/she feels the cause of fatigue may be an undiagnosed illness."

"Untreated fatigue could have serious mental health effects. It may become difficult for you to concentrate and take decisions. You'll start to feel depressed, and may fall asleep during the day at work. Chronic fatigue can affect your overall health and make you prone to serious medical conditions such as obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes," she added.

MANAGING FATIGUE

Doctors say that fatigue often is not a medical issue and can be easily reversed by change of lifestyle. By making slight modifications, you can save energy and feel less tired. "Eliminate unnecessary tasks from your daily routine, use professional services for heavy cleaning, laundry or physical tasks. Organise your work in such a manner that it does not cause you stress, store frequently used items within easy reach, work at a steady and moderate pace with frequent and short breaks rather than one

BEHIND THE FEELING

COMMON CAUSES OF FATIGUE

- Poor blood supply to body tissues
- Illnesses that affect metabolism
- Infections and inflammatory diseases
- Not sleeping enough
- Depression (causes anxiety and sadness)
- Lack of nutritional food
- Diabetes
- Anaemia



THE LINE OF DIFFERENCE

Tiredness is temporary but fatigue can last for six months or longer

Dr Jyothsna Krishnappa, senior consultant internal medicine, Apollo Hospital, Bengaluru



THINKSTOCK

COME OUT OF IT

REDUCE STRESS

- Think if your stress is worth it
- Avoid overreacting
- Keep emotional swings under control
- Give yourself time to relax every day

IMPROVE SLEEP HABITS

- Fix your sleeping hours
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine
- Avoid excessive alcohol consumption

MIND YOUR ACTIVITY

- Learn what the adequate amount of exercise is for you
- Try to do something every day like walking or cycling
- Try to avoid over-exerting physically in the enthusiasm of workouts
- Balance your work and rest-time appropriately



If a person is feeling fatigued by doing simple activities like climbing stairs, cycling or cleaning, it could signal a heart problem. "When the heart is less able to pump blood to all of the body's tissues, it conserves resources by diverting blood from the limbs and instead sends it to the vital organs. This can cause fatigue. So, beware and con-

long break, have a minimum of 7-8 hours of sleep, take care of your body, indulge in daily exercise, use good lifting methods; back straight, bend at the hips and knees rather than the waist, avoid straining, reaching and twisting, work at proper height to eliminate bending or stooping, use a cart, wagon or basket to gather and carry items,

slide or push objects rather than carry them," Das said.

GET YOUR ENERGY BACK

"Fatigue can be prevented by having a good breakfast and eating on time," said Sisodia. The good old "early to bed, early to rise..." applies well to tackle fatigue, she said.

Eating on time is important as it gives energy to your body; eat more of fruits and dry nuts in between meals; have drinks such as butter milk, lime juices, fresh fruit juices and lots of water; have a balanced diet and always consult a clinical nutritionist if you feel unusually tired; include more moisture-containing fruits in your diet; avoid spicy and fast foods; avoid sweets, refined and deep fried foods.

Try to have natural, whole foods; unprocessed foods and greens are a must. Keep yourself hydrated throughout the day is the key; Tofu, oats, banana and complex carbs can give you instant energy.

Being mindful of what's on your plate can be a healthy and effective way to keep your energy up. With regular exercise and good nutrition, you can maintain healthy levels of energy, said Krishnappa.

Das said: "Diet can significantly affect how tired or energetic we feel. Try to eat small and frequent meals throughout the day. Eat snacks that are

low in sugar and avoid junk food. Opt for a well-balanced diet comprising plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Always drink alcoholic and caffeinated beverages in moderation, or not at all. Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening."

Dehydration is a common cause of fatigue during hot weather. Hot weather may also cause you to experience restless nights, which can result in extreme fatigue during the following day. To prevent fatigue caused by dehydration during hot weather, drink plenty of fluids regularly throughout the day.

IF YOU WORK IN SHIFTS...

Shift work can wreak havoc on your body's 24-hour internal clock (circadian rhythm) and can cause fatigue. When you work nights, your body doesn't know when to be awake and when to sleep, which causes fatigue. Daylight is often a cue to be awake. If you must sleep during the day, try to make your sleeping area as dark, cool, and quiet as possible. If you're a late-night worker, keep your workplace brightly lit. Try to work night shifts all in a row and avoid frequently rotating shifts. Stay away from caffeine, and stick to a regular sleep-wake schedule as much as possible, said Krishnappa.

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