

Share:    

Fatigue in Older Adults

[Español](#)

On this page:

- [What causes fatigue?](#)
- [Emotional exhaustion: Can emotions cause fatigue?](#)
- [Lifestyle habits and fatigue](#)
- [Tips to feel less tired](#)
- [When should I see a doctor for fatigue?](#)

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness, or lack of energy. It can be a normal response to physical activity, emotional stress, boredom, or lack of sleep, but it can also signal a more serious mental or physical condition.

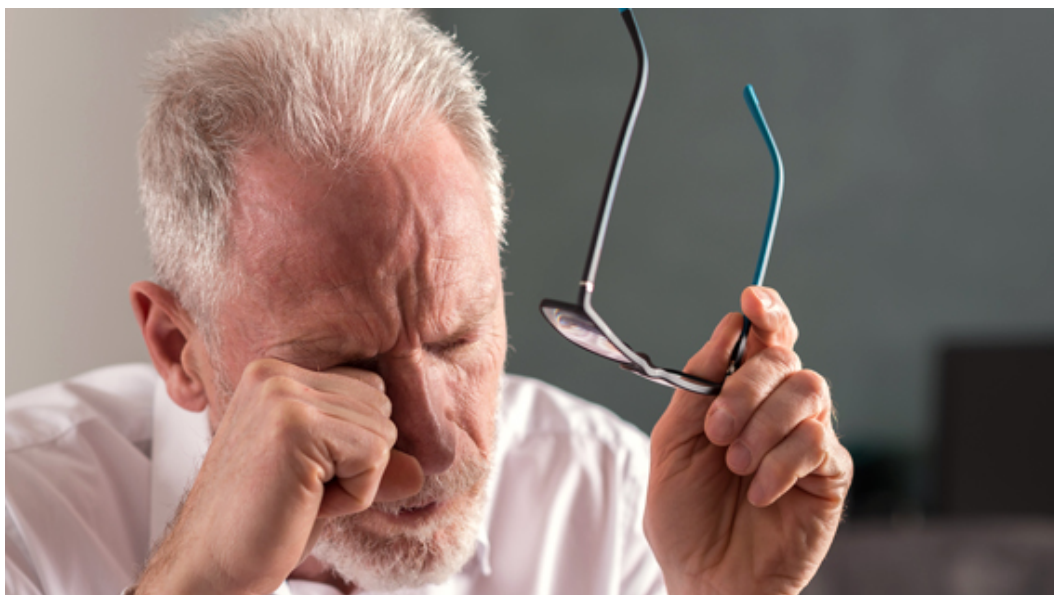
Everyone feels tired now and then. If you feel tired continuously for multiple weeks, you may want to see your doctor, who can help discover what's causing your fatigue and identify ways to relieve it.

What causes fatigue?

Sometimes, fatigue can be the first sign that something is wrong in your body. For example, people with [rheumatoid arthritis](#), a painful condition that affects the joints, often complain of fatigue. People with [cancer](#) may feel fatigued from the disease, treatments, or both.

Many medical problems and treatments can add to fatigue. These include:

- Having medical treatments, like chemotherapy and radiation, or recovering from major surgery



- Infections
- Chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, thyroid disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Untreated pain and diseases like fibromyalgia
- Anemia
- Sleep apnea and other sleep disorders
- Recent stroke
- Parkinson's disease
- Taking certain [medications](#), such as antidepressants, antihistamines, and medicines for nausea and [pain](#)

[Talk with your doctor](#) about any concerns you may have about fatigue and your health condition. Treating an underlying or known health problem may help reduce fatigue.

Parkinson's disease and fatigue

Fatigue can be a non-movement symptom of [Parkinson's disease](#). It is common early on in Parkinson's, but a person can experience fatigue at any point during the disease. If you or someone you know with Parkinson's is experiencing fatigue, it's important to talk with your doctor.

Emotional exhaustion: Can emotions cause fatigue?

Do you worry about your health and who will take care of you? Have you recently lost a loved one? Or have you lost your mobility and independence? Emotional stresses like these can take a toll on your energy. Fatigue can be linked to many conditions, including:

- Anxiety
- [Depression](#)
- [Grief from loss of family](#) or friends
- Stress from financial or personal problems
- Feeling that you no longer have control over your life

Not getting enough sleep can also contribute to fatigue. Regular [physical activity](#) can improve your sleep, help reduce feelings of depression and stress, and boost your mood and overall well-being. Yoga, meditation, deep breathing, and stretching may help reduce stress and anxiety and help you get more rest. Therapy or certain medications may also help relieve anxiety and depression that may be contributing to fatigue.

Talk with your doctor if your mental health seems to be affecting your sleep or making you tired.

What is chronic fatigue syndrome?

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) or ME/CFS, is a condition in which fatigue lasts six months or longer and is not related to other diseases or conditions. People with CFS experience symptoms that make it hard to do daily tasks like dressing or bathing. Along with severe fatigue that doesn't get better with rest, CFS symptoms can include problems with sleep, memory and concentrating, pain, dizziness, sore throat, and tender lymph nodes.

Lifestyle habits and fatigue

Some lifestyle habits can make you feel tired, such as:

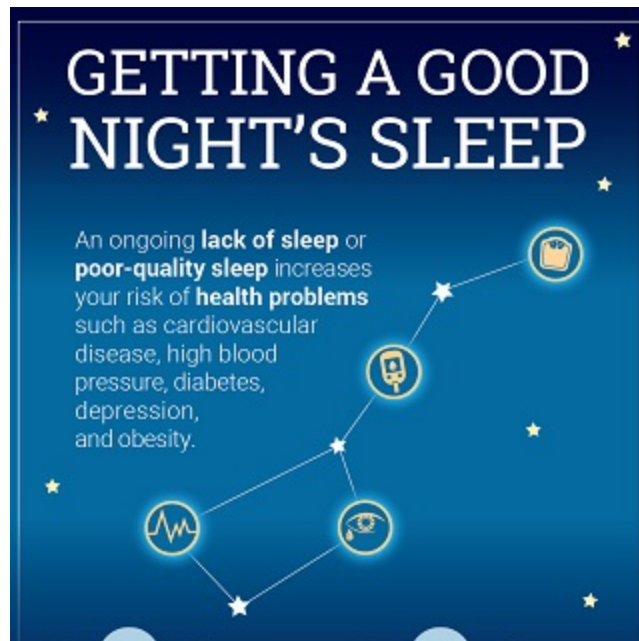
- **Staying up too late.** A good night's sleep is important to feeling refreshed and energetic. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
- **Having too much caffeine.** Drinking caffeinated soda, tea, or coffee, or even eating chocolate, can keep you from getting a good night's sleep. Limit the amount of caffeine you have during the day and avoid it in the evening.
- **Drinking too much alcohol.** [Alcohol](#) is a central nervous system depressant that changes the way you think and act. It may also interact negatively with certain medicines.
- **Getting too little or too much exercise.** Regular exercise can help boost your energy levels. Overdoing it without proper rest can cause stress and lead to fatigue.
- **Boredom.** If you were busy during your working years, you may feel lost about how to spend your time when you retire. Engaging in social and productive [activities that you enjoy](#), such as volunteering in your community, can help maintain your well-being.

Tips to feel less tired

Making changes to your lifestyle may help you feel less tired, for example:

- **Exercise regularly.** Almost anyone, at any age, can do some type of physical activity. If you have concerns about starting an exercise program, ask your doctor if there are any activities you should avoid. Moderate exercise may improve your appetite, energy, and outlook. Some people find that exercises combining balance and breathing (for example, tai chi or yoga) improve their energy.
- **Try to avoid long naps** (over 30 minutes) late in the day. Long naps can leave you feeling groggy and may make it harder to fall asleep at night. Read [A Good Night's Sleep](#) for tips on getting better rest at night.

- **Stop smoking.** Smoking is linked to many diseases and disorders, such as cancer, [heart disease](#), and breathing problems, all of which are associated with fatigue.
- **Ask for help if you feel swamped.** Some people have so much to do that just thinking about their schedules can make them feel tired. Working with others may help a job go faster and be more fun.
- **Participate in activities you enjoy.** [Socializing with friends and family](#) or volunteering in your community can help you feel more engaged and productive throughout the day.
- **Eat well and avoid alcohol.** Eating [nutritious foods](#) can give you energy throughout the day. Staying away from alcoholic drinks can help you avoid negative interactions with medications.
- **Keep a fatigue diary.** This can help you find patterns throughout the day when you feel more or less tired. It can also help you plan out activities that may give you more energy.



[Read and share this infographic](#) to get tips on how to get a good night's sleep.

When should I see a doctor for fatigue?

If you've been tired or been experiencing low energy for several weeks with no relief, call your health care provider. They will ask questions about your sleep, daily activities, appetite, and exercise, and likely provide a physical examination and order lab tests.

Your treatment will be based on your history and the results of your exam and lab tests. You may be prescribed medications to target underlying health problems, such as anemia or abnormal thyroid function. Health care providers also may suggest therapy or certain medications to help reduce depression, anxiety, or other emotional contributors that are associated with fatigue. They may also advise that you eat a [well-balanced diet](#) and [begin an exercise program](#).

You may also be interested in

- Learning about [depression and older adults](#)
- Finding [tips for talking with your doctor](#)
- Exploring [tips for getting a good night's sleep](#)

Sign up for email updates on healthy aging

*Email Address

[Subscribe](#)

For more information about fatigue

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

800-232-4636

888-232-6348 (TTY)

cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237

cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov

www.cancer.gov

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

888-644-6226

866-464-3615 (TTY)

info@nccih.nih.gov

www.nccih.nih.gov

MedlinePlus

National Library of Medicine

www.medlineplus.gov

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

Content reviewed: March 27, 2023

[Return to top](#)

Newsletters

Sign up to receive updates and resources delivered to your inbox.

Sign up

nia.nih.gov

An official website of the [National Institutes of Health](#)