

SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF MS FATIGUE

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Solving The Puzzle of MS Fatigue

Do any of these feel familiar?

"I'm so tired, I can't even think."

"I get myself up and dressed and then I need a nap!"

"I feel like a limp noodle."

"I just wanted to get one thing done today, and I've already hit a wall."

"I feel like I'm slogging through mud all the time."

It can be overwhelming and baffling, but fatigue is manageable. It's a puzzle made up of many parts.

What are the Pieces of the Puzzle?

MS lassitude is the type of fatigue that is unique to people with MS. Its cause is not completely understood, but it seems to result from impaired nerve conduction in the central nervous system. This type of fatigue:

- Feels overwhelming and overpowering
- Can come on suddenly and worsen over the course of the day
- Is commonly aggravated by temperature changes – most often heat and humidity
- Is unrelated to the amount of sleep a person has had and may occur first thing in the morning

Fatigue in MS has other causes and correlations, too.

Disrupted sleep can increase fatigue. This can be caused by pain, repeated trips to the bathroom, anxiety, depression, sleep apnea, or other primary sleep problems unrelated to MS.

The **extra effort** and exertion required to carry out everyday activities can drain your batteries very quickly.

Muscle fatigue caused by working weakened muscles can stop you in your tracks.

Cognitive fatigue can occur during periods of intense focus or concentration. It may force you to stop, rest, and refocus.

Mood changes, including **depression, anxiety, and stress** can increase your feelings of tiredness.

Meanwhile, **medication side effects** can contribute to feelings of sleepiness and fatigue.

Arranging the Puzzle Pieces

Managing fatigue is really about managing your *energy*. You want to arrange your life in ways that help you optimize it.

Energy is a valuable commodity – as precious as money in the bank. So, the trick is to manage it as carefully as you manage your dollars and cents.

Managing your deposits and withdrawals

It's as simple as this – if the funds aren't deposited into your account, you can't make a withdrawal. And you can't take more energy out of your energy bank than you put in.

You make deposits with adequate rest, a healthy diet, stress management, and physical activity.

And then you plan your withdrawals carefully so that you don't use all your energy up too quickly.

If you push too hard on a “good day,” you’ll find yourself paying back into your account for the next several days. If you put every ounce of energy into your job, there’s nothing left for enjoying your family at the end of the day. To best manage your energy account, use the 4 P’s.

The 4 P’s

- **Planning** – Plan your day and your week so that you balance activity with rest, work on the hardest tasks when you’re at your freshest, and take a break *before* you hit a wall
- **Prioritizing** – Take a look at how you spend your time and energy. Does it align with your priorities or someone else’s? Are you getting the things done that matter most? If something really doesn’t matter, take it off your list. Give yourself grace – it’s OK to not do it all!
- **Pacing** – Slow down, take rest breaks, don’t try to do everything at once. If you need to put a task off until tomorrow, that’s OK.
- **Positioning** – How you carry out your everyday tasks determines how much energy you use. Don’t stand when you can sit. Consider using a motorized scooter to go long distances so that you still have energy left to enjoy yourself when you get to your destination. Arrange your environment so that there’s less bending, reaching, lifting as you go about your daily tasks.

Seeing the Big Picture

With so many pieces to this puzzle, your healthcare team is here to help you see the big picture and understand which factors are affecting your fatigue. Here’s who can help:

MS Provider (Neurologist, Nurse Practitioner, Physician Assistant)

- Pinpoint the sources of your fatigue
- Determine which medications might be contributing to your fatigue
- Help manage pain or spasms caused by spasticity
- Prescribe medication to help relieve MS lassitude

Physical Therapist

- Recommend a physical activity and exercise program to increase your energy
- Recommend tools and mobility aids to help you conserve energy

Occupational Therapist

- Teach energy conservation strategies for daily activities
- This can include ways to modify your environment, simplify tasks, and make the most of the energy you have

Mental Health Professional

- Identify and treat mood changes that may be affecting your energy level and your sleep

Sleep Specialist

- Diagnose and treat any primary sleep problems such as sleep apnea that are interfering with your sleep

Urologist

- Diagnose and treat urinary problems that are disrupting your sleep

Fatigue is a reality when you live with MS, but there are ways to solve the puzzle! You *can* reduce that fatigue, manage the energy you have more effectively, and get the things done that matter to you.

Utilize your healthcare team, your support system, and additional resources found on our website, <https://www.cando-ms.org> (<https://www.cando-ms.org/popular-topics/fatigue>) to better fight fatigue.