

Fatigue After an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Fatigue (feeling very tired) is common after an ABI. You may feel fatigued by physical activity, cognitive (thinking) tasks, or just everyday activities. If you have problems with mood, speech, concentration, memory, vision, balance, or coordination, fatigue can make them worse.

For most people, managing fatigue gets better over time. It is important to learn how to plan your daily tasks, so that you are getting the right amount of activity for you – not too much or too little. It is important to balance activity and rest to manage your fatigue.

What causes fatigue after an ABI?

You may have fatigue after an ABI because:

- › your brain is working harder than it did before
- › some of your energy is being used to help your brain recover
- › of other factors, such as medication(s), poor sleep, pain, stress, and/or depression

You may experience fatigue in different ways:

- › It may take you longer to do things.
- › You may feel physically worn out.
- › You may get frustrated or grumpy more easily.
- › You may find it hard to concentrate.
- › You may find it hard to do more than one thing at a time.
- › You may find that your thinking is slower and it is harder to get your words out.

Things that can make fatigue worse include:

- › trying to do too much
- › stress or illness
- › pain or headaches
- › poor sleep
- › noisy or busy places
- › not taking breaks
- › depression, anxiety
- › poor nutrition
- › too much or too little exercise
- › social events or crowds

Tips for coping with fatigue

1. Recognize the early warning signs and take breaks.

- › Learn your early signs of fatigue and stop to rest **before** you push yourself too far. These early signs may include slower thinking, clumsiness, grumpiness, or the start of a headache.

2. Pace yourself.

- › Set aside time to make a daily or weekly plan. Put your plan somewhere you can see it (for example, on the fridge). Plan rests between activities, and before and after you have a busy period. Switch between easy tasks and harder ones. Balance work and chores, physical activity, and things you enjoy.

3. Break big tasks into smaller parts.

- › Do part of a big task instead of the whole task at once, if you can break it up. For example, clean one room instead of the whole house, or mow the front lawn and leave the back lawn for later.

4. Be realistic.

- › Choose an amount of activity that you know you can handle. This increases your chance of success, and gives you energy to keep going. **Avoid overdoing things when you are feeling good**, as this often leads to worse fatigue later.

5. Plan **WHEN** you will do things.

- › Planning can help make tasks more manageable and less stressful. Do important and/or harder tasks when you have the most energy – this may be in the morning or after a rest. Plan to do these tasks when you don't have other things taking your attention or time. For example, avoid driving in rush-hour traffic and shop at less busy times – this will save time and energy.

6. Plan **HOW** you will do things.

- › Work in a quiet place when possible to reduce distractions and stimulation. When running errands, plan what you will do first, and take a list with you. For shopping, order over the phone or call ahead so things are ready when you get to the store. Buy prepared foods (e.g., pre-chopped veggies, frozen meals) or consider using a meal delivery service for awhile to save time and energy.

Resources

Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia

- › Phone: 902-473-7301
- › www.braininjuryns.com

Concussion Nova Scotia

- › www.concussionns.com

211 Nova Scotia – a free helpline that connects you to community and social services in your area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in over 150 languages.

- › Phone: 211
- › www.ns211.ca