

Fatigue: Overworked or Imbalanced?

Are you tired of feeling tired? Are you unable to tap into a reservoir of energy when needed? Fatigue can be the culprit, and for millions of people, its effects can be debilitating. The cause of fatigue is multi factorial. Lack of exercise and improper diet play the largest role for most;¹ however, there can be underlying contributing issues as well. Simple laboratory testing can discover a number of potential causes for fatigue: Thyroid deficiency, anemia, liver dysfunction, viruses, etc can all contribute to the problem. But what do you do when your doctor runs all of these tests and they come back normal. This is too often the case for fatigue sufferers. Many doctors cite depression and try to prescribe medication despite adequate proof to do so. Many doctors simply refer the patient out to a psychiatrist. The bottom line is that fatigue sufferers are often left with unacceptable choices that don't address the root of the problem.

To determine the cause and best treatment for fatigue, all of the factors causing the fatigue must be identified.² Underlying factors that contribute to fatigue should be evaluated and treated when possible. Common contributing factors include: anemia, stress, eating an improper diet, poor sleep habits, excessive caffeine and sugar intake, chronic pain, dehydration, side effects from medications, nutritional deficiencies,

lack of exercise, and abusive relationships.

Nearly 20% of all patients who seek a physician's assistance in treating a health concern include fatigue as a symptom relative to their affliction.⁵ As with most physical and emotional conditions, medications are commonly prescribed by doctors to treat symptoms of a condition rather than addressing the underlying cause. Many prescription and over the counter medications can have side effects that contribute to fatigue. Some medicines deplete vitamins and minerals necessary for the body to make energy. Some medications affect the liver and kidneys and indirectly contribute to fatigue. One of the most common side effects of medication use is fatigue. This is a big problem because according to an Associated Press Report from May of 2008, half of all Americans are taking prescription medications.

To maintain functional health, the body requires essential nutrients, sun light, clean air, exercise, and emotional stability and support. Most doctors do not take the time to assess these areas of essentiality and rely on tools like the Food Guide Pyramid to generalize their recommendations to patients. Unfortunately, general broad spectrum recommendations do not account for individual variability and can actually make the situation worse. For example, eating 8-10 servings of whole grains can cause

severe illness in an individual who is gluten intolerant. Another example is sun avoidance to reduce the risk of skin cancer: Some individuals have genetic variations that do not allow them to metabolize vitamin D as well as others. Sun light avoidance in these individual can actually increase the risk for cancer.

Finding a doctor who practices functional medicine is critical if you want to address the underlying causes of fatigue. The doctor should be willing to spend enough time with you to adequately assess your problems. Less than 40 minutes of face time with the doctor is inadequate to perform a complete history and physical examination. Laboratory testing should focus on identifying genetic variability and functional parameters based on the uniqueness or the individual not just the condition. Additionally, the doctor should practice what they preach. How can you expect someone in poor health to give good health advice?

References:

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