



Fighting Fatigue

Fatigue is a fancy word for always feeling tired, even after resting, to the point that it's hard for you to do your normal daily activities. It can be both physical and/or mental. Fatigue can become a barrier to buying food, cooking and eating meals, and even taking your medications. When you don't eat, you starve your brain, muscles, and immune system, causing them to not work as well as they should. So what can you do to get some relief?

The first step: Speak with your medical provider. One thing they can do is perform a simple blood test to see if you are anemic. Anemia is a condition with your red blood cells that prevents your body from getting enough oxygen from your lungs to all of your body parts, making you feel tired easily. Several things, including some HIV medications and vitamin deficiencies, can cause anemia. Your medical provider can also test for other common causes of fatigue.

Some other causes of fatigue:

- HIV itself - the body uses a lot of energy to fight the HIV virus
- Uncontrolled high blood glucose or diabetes
- Decreased food intake or poor absorption
- Stress, depression, and/or disrupted sleep patterns
- Low levels of testosterone or thyroid hormone
- Medications –both HIV medications and others
- Other infections you may get as a result of a weakened immune system

Tips to help you deal with fatigue:

- ✓ Exercise. 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days can help minimize fatigue. If you can't do 30 minutes at once, break it up into two 15 minute walks or activities.
- ✓ When you are cooking on days you feel good, make extras and freeze it in individual portions for later meals. Use them for times you feel too tired to cook.
- ✓ Have a few frozen meals, hot cereals, pastas with ready-to-eat sauce, and easy to make snacks like crackers and cheese on hand for times when you are too tired to cook.
- ✓ Make a list of foods that are easy to prepare so you have ideas on days when you are too tired to even think.
- ✓ Make every bite count – don't waste your time eating low nutrient foods like rice cakes or Jell-O®. Ask our dietitian for quick and easy, but health promoting, meal and snack ideas.
- ✓ Make homemade shakes or keep liquid nutritional supplements like Ensure® on hand (ask our dietitian for shake recipes). Drinking your food can be a lot easier than chewing it.
- ✓ Decrease your consumption of caffeine – it may actually be making your fatigue worse. Caffeine is found in most coffee, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and tea.
- ✓ Make sure to take a daily multivitamin, especially if you are having a hard time eating a variety of foods. Ask our dietitian for personalized vitamin recommendations.
- ✓ Sign up for a community food program, like Chicken Soup Brigade –Lifelong's Food Program, or ask friends and family to help you shop, cook, and clean up.
- ✓ Minimize clean up – use paper cups and plates. Bake in disposable foil pans or line dishes with foil when baking so you don't have to wash the dishes afterwards.

Although no pill can substitute for real food, you may want to ask your medical provider or dietitian about the following supplements that could be helpful for increasing your energy (if you are deficient in them):

-B vitamins including B12 - CoQ10 (especially if taking statin medication) - L-Carnitine-

To schedule a FREE visit with a Chicken Soup Brigade dietitian, call (206) 957-1600