

Fatigue and Parkinson's

Many people use the words **fatigue and tiredness to mean the same thing, but they're not.**

You can feel tired after things like exercising or a bad night's sleep, but tiredness usually goes away with rest.

Unlike tiredness, people can experience fatigue at any time, and it doesn't improve with rest.

What is fatigue?

Fatigue can be described as an overwhelming feeling of tiredness, exhaustion and a lack of energy. It's more than a one-off feeling of tiredness that goes away after a good sleep or nap.

Anyone can feel fatigued when they're working too hard, or when pressures at work or home make you stressed. But fatigue can also be a specific symptom of Parkinson's and other conditions.

Is fatigue common in Parkinson's?

Up to half of people with Parkinson's experience fatigue at some point.

The length of time that people have had Parkinson's doesn't seem to make much difference to their risk of experiencing fatigue. Fatigue may be one of the earliest symptoms you have, or it could appear after living with Parkinson's for a long time.

How does fatigue affect people with Parkinson's?

The effects of fatigue on Parkinson's vary from person to person. They can change day-to-day or even hour-to-hour.

You may feel quite fit and able one day and then too fatigued to do much the following day. This might be because things that came naturally before your diagnosis now take more effort.

If you're working, you may feel exhausted after you've finished work and you might not want to do anything else.

What causes fatigue in Parkinson's?

Many people with Parkinson's experience fatigue, but it's also common in people with other long-term health conditions.

Researchers are working to uncover what causes fatigue in Parkinson's, as this is something we don't yet fully understand.

Fatigue in Parkinson's is thought to be linked to chemical changes that happen in the brain. It may also be related to other symptoms or features of the condition. Such as:

- the timing and dosage of your medication. This can mean that you feel energetic and capable of doing everyday jobs at certain times of the day, but not at other times
- tremor, stiffness or involuntary movements, which may put stress on your muscles. It means they work harder, often against each other, in order to move or complete a task and can become fatigued quickly
- slowness of movement (bradykinesia). If you experience this, tasks can take you longer to complete than they used to, leading to fatigue
- stress. Parkinson's and its symptoms can cause stress at work or home and this can make fatigue worse, particularly true if stress builds up over a period of time

It's also important to remember that mental (cognitive) fatigue can be just as difficult to manage.

Mental fatigue is usually worse the more complex the activity or task is. Some people find it hard to concentrate for a long time without a break. This can cause problems if you are still in work.

Parkinson's is not the only health condition that causes fatigue. Thyroid problems, vitamin deficiencies, anaemia and diabetes can also cause it.

You should discuss any feelings of mental or physical fatigue with your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse.

Can fatigue be treated?

If your feelings of fatigue are related to other Parkinson's symptoms, such as tremor, stiffness or involuntary movements, Parkinson's medication might help.

However, sometimes Parkinson's drugs don't help with fatigue. There's currently not enough scientific evidence showing that Parkinson's medication is an effective treatment for fatigue on its own.

But Parkinson's drugs can help you manage your other symptoms, so you might feel you have more energy to do things that might otherwise be difficult.

Also, remember that fatigue might not be related to your Parkinson's, but could be caused by another health condition, such as a thyroid problem.

In some cases, non-drug treatments can help you manage your fatigue. One example is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is a type of talking therapy.

CBT can help you manage fatigue practically by helping you to focus on what's causing it and how it impacts you.

Fatigue is often related to sleep disturbance or depression. If this is the case, other medications may help. Your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse will be able to discuss options that might work for you.

What can I do about fatigue?

Fatigue can be made worse by doing too little or trying to do too much.

Spreading out or 'pacing' your activities (both physical and mental) is a useful way to manage the problem. People who try to fit everything into a short period of time tend to 'crash' afterwards, making their fatigue worse.

Other people avoid activity to stop themselves becoming fatigued, but this also seems to make fatigue worse over time.

Stress can make fatigue worse too. Anything that you can do to manage your stress levels is likely to have a positive effect on your fatigue.

Practically this means that there are a number of things you can do yourself to try to avoid fatigue or help minimise it.

An occupational therapist can suggest ways to manage fatigue at work and at home, and advise on adaptations and equipment that can help.

Find out more: [see our information on occupational therapy and Parkinson's.](#)

At work

If you're working, it might not be easy to rearrange your daily tasks. Instead, try to take regular, short breaks. This can help your concentration and avoid fatigue building up.

A break can be something as simple as making a cup of tea, having a chat with a colleague, or sitting back for a few moments with your eyes closed.

Find out more: [see our information on work and Parkinson's.](#)

Around the home

If you live with someone, it might be useful to divide household tasks, so that you do the jobs you can manage more easily.

There are also a number of gadgets and home adaptations that can help you make your daily life with Parkinson's easier. An occupational therapist can provide advice on this.

Physical activity and exercise

Exercise is good for people with Parkinson's, especially if you experience fatigue.

Fatigue can often trigger a cycle in which you become less and less active. This can happen if your daily activities make you feel tired. But the less you do, the weaker your muscles become, and the more fatigued you'll feel over time.

Exercise can help you manage your fatigue, boost your mood and help you sleep well. The more you can do the better. Find something that suits you at the right level and go for it. This could be as simple as chair-based exercises or a brisk walk that gets your heart rate up.

To get started, a physiotherapist can recommend exercise that is right for you.

Exercise referral schemes may be organised in your local area through your GP, local council or sports centre. You can also be referred for physiotherapy by your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse.

Find out more about the benefits of exercise and the different types to focus on at parkinsons.org.uk/exercise

Mental exercise

Fatigue is not just physical. Mental exercise is also important. Try to stay involved with your hobbies and interests.

If you have time during the day, try to do a variety of activities, as boredom can also lead to fatigue.

Diet

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is important, so try to make sure you're eating a variety of foods.

Some people find that a small snack every couple of hours provides them with a constant supply of glucose, which is used for energy and can help reduce feelings of tiredness in the short-term. However, this strategy will not suit everyone, particularly people who have diabetes. It's a good idea to discuss any significant changes in your diet with your GP or Parkinson's nurse.

Sometimes, you might feel fatigued after a large midday meal. A short nap at this time may reduce the sense of fatigue. You could also try having a smaller, lighter meal at lunchtimes.

Find out more: [see our information on diet and Parkinson's.](#)

A poor diet can sometimes leads to constipation. Constipation is common in Parkinson's, and it can leave you feeling sluggish, which can make fatigue worse. Speak to your GP or Parkinson's nurse if you experience constipation, as they can help you manage it.

Find out more: [see our information on looking after your bowels when you have Parkinson's.](#)

Daily routine

It's important to do what you can, but try to pace yourself – don't ignore feelings of fatigue.

Try to perform as much of your daily routine as you can by yourself, but take a rest or get help when you think you need it.

If you're feeling fatigued, it may help to spread what you do over the course of your day rather than forcing too much into a short amount of time.

You might find that even after a good night's rest you're feeling more fatigued than usual. This may be due to having overworked the day before or it might simply be due to the way that your condition fluctuates.

Whatever the cause of fatigue, keep in mind that you will have days when you feel more energetic than others.

Remember, fatigue won't go away immediately or completely, but with time you should be able to recognise what you can do and when you might have difficulty. You can then plan your time so that episodes of fatigue are manageable.

If you're on medication you can also plan around the times when it works best.

Getting a good balance between rest and activity will help you handle fatigue and improve your quality of life.

Monitoring fatigue

Assessing your fatigue and what works for you can be really helpful.

Parkinson's UK has a non-motor symptoms questionnaire available, which can help you and your healthcare professional assess your symptoms, including fatigue. Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/professionals/resources/non-motor-symptoms-questionnaire](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/professionals/resources/non-motor-symptoms-questionnaire) or call our helpline on **0808 800 0303**.

You could also try keeping a diary to monitor your fatigue and work out how to manage it. Keeping a diary may help you to arrange to do more difficult daily tasks when you're feeling less tired.

Problems you may experience related to fatigue

Sleep and night-time problems

Many people with Parkinson's experience problems with sleep.

You might wake up during the night because of tremor or stiffness, when you're having difficulty turning over in bed, or if you need to go to the toilet.

Waking during the night can leave you feeling tired and lethargic during the day, and it might mean you're not able to complete tasks so well. Poor sleep doesn't cause fatigue but it can make it worse.

Night-time problems will also make you feel sleepy during the day. Resting can help. However, frequent napping can make sleeping at night more difficult.

It's important that you find out the reasons for sleep and night-time problems, because many of them can be treated. Treating these problems can help you feel better during the day.

Understanding the causes of your fatigue can also help you to develop good sleeping habits that give you more energy overall.

Find out more: see our [information on sleep and Parkinson's](#).

Depression

Many people with Parkinson's experience depression, even if they're not formally diagnosed with it.

Depression involves more than just feeling 'down' for a short while. If you're depressed, you might experience a range of symptoms for long periods of time.

It's common for people with depression to experience fatigue, and depression can make fatigue worse. However, not everyone with fatigue feels depressed.

If you're diagnosed with depression, there are effective treatments available. They might involve a combination of medication, talking therapies or counselling.

If you have fatigue and you're concerned about depression, speak to your GP or Parkinson's nurse for advice. They can refer you to a mental health specialist if needed.

Find out more: [see our information on depression and Parkinson's.](#)

Apathy

Apathy can be described as a lack of enthusiasm and emotion for everyday activities.

Apathy can feel a lot like depression and fatigue. You may find you lose interest in activities that you previously enjoyed.

Like depression, apathy needs to be diagnosed so it can be treated. Speak to your GP, Parkinson's nurse or specialist if you think you may be experiencing apathy.

Your rights at work if you experience fatigue

The Equality Act 2010 (England, Scotland and Wales) states that employers must make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.

These could include flexible or reduced hours, or allowing for a little extra rest, either at a regular time each day or whenever necessary.

There is similar equality legislation in Northern Ireland.

If you're a member of a trade union, they should be able to negotiate on your behalf to ask your employer to make reasonable adjustments. They should also be able to advise on other disability discrimination issues.

If fatigue or any other symptoms of Parkinson's have an impact on your daily life, you may be entitled to some benefits, such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This can be paid to people who are in work, as well as to people who are not.

If you have any questions about your rights under The Equality Act 2010, or you would like to speak to someone about welfare benefits, call our free confidential helpline on **0808 800 0303**.

Driving

Feeling fatigued or excessively tired can affect your driving.

You must tell the DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland) if you have a medical condition that affects your driving. If you do not you can be fined up to £1000.

Having Parkinson's doesn't necessarily mean you have to stop driving. The DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland) will ask for more information about your condition and assess if it's safe for you to continue driving.

For more information visit [gov.uk/parkinsons-disease-and-driving](https://www.gov.uk/parkinsons-disease-and-driving) or call **0300 790 6806**.

For Northern Ireland visit nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-tell-dva-about-medical-condition or call **0300 200 7861**.

You can also speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for advice.

Find out more: [see our information on driving and Parkinson's.](#)

More information and support

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them.

They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at [parkinsons.org.uk/nurses](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/nurses)

Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk.

Our helpline can put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

Our website [parkinsons.org.uk](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk) has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at [parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)

Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/forum) to chat to other people with similar experiences on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet.

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**. Thank you.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **parkinsons.org.uk/information-support**

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information.

We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**



Fatigue and Parkinson's (FS72/2020)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to **Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**, or email **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**. Thank you!

1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in I care for someone with Parkinson's
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's
 Other (please specify)

2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP Specialist Parkinson's nurse Parkinson's UK local group Parkinson's UK local adviser
 Ordered directly from us Call to the helpline
 Other (please specify)

3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely Yes, mostly Not sure Partly Not at all

4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy Easy Not sure Quite difficult Very difficult

We're the Parkinson's charity that drives better care, treatments and quality of life.

Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 1EJ

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
(Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm).

Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices). For more information see **www.ngts.org.uk**

hello@parkinsons.org.uk
parkinsons.org.uk

Order code: FS72

Last updated June 2020. We review our information within three years.
Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.

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5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

It helped a lot It helped a little No change It didn't help It made things worse

6. What is your ethnic background?*

Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other
 Other (please specify)

*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

Want to hear more from us?

I would like a response to my feedback I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you? Email Post Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at [parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)