Fatigue can be caused by Parkinson’s, but it has other causes too. This information sheet explains what fatigue is, how Parkinson’s can make you feel fatigued and how it may be managed.

What is fatigue?
Fatigue is more than a feeling of occasional tiredness. Although many use the terms fatigue and sleepiness interchangeably, they are considered as separate things. Sleepy people may fall asleep at inappropriate times during the day, whereas people with fatigue need to rest but do not generally drop off to sleep.

Fatigue has been described as an overwhelming sense of tiredness, a lack of energy and a feeling of exhaustion. This can be a physical, mental or an emotional feeling. Anybody can feel fatigued when they are working too hard, or when pressures at work or at home cause stress. Fatigue can also be a symptom of an illness. Sometimes it can be difficult to work out what may be causing it.

Is fatigue common in Parkinson’s?
Feelings of fatigue can be common for people with Parkinson’s and can be experienced at any point during the course of the condition.

How fatigue affects people varies from person to person, which can make it difficult to measure accurately. For some people, fatigue can be very difficult to live with, while others can manage the symptom well.

People who are newly diagnosed with Parkinson’s can be just as likely to experience fatigue as those who have had the condition for some time – in fact, it may be one of the earliest symptoms you have. Also, the fatigue experienced by a newly diagnosed person may not be any more or less severe than for someone who has had Parkinson’s for a long time.

How Parkinson’s affects someone can change from day to day and even hour to hour. You may feel quite fit and able one day and then too tired to do much the following. It may be related to the fact that many things
that might have come naturally before your diagnosis may now take more effort. If you are in employment, for example, a day’s work may leave you feeling much more exhausted in the evenings than it used to and you may not want to do anything else.

**What causes fatigue in Parkinson’s?**
We don’t know if fatigue in Parkinson’s is caused by something specific, but it’s possible it can be related to other symptoms of the condition. For example, you may feel energetic and capable of doing everyday jobs at certain times of the day, but not at others. This may sometimes be related to the timing and dosage of your medication.

Tremor, stiffness or involuntary movements that some people with Parkinson’s experience may put stress on your muscles, which have to work harder, often against each other, in order to start moving or complete a task. In this case, your muscles may become fatigued quickly and easily. Also, if you experience slowness of movement (bradykinesia), tasks may take you longer to complete than they used to, leading to fatigue.

This kind of physical fatigue can cause problems in the workplace and, like other Parkinson’s symptoms such as tremor, it may be made worse by stress.

It’s also important to remember that mental fatigue can be just as difficult to manage. Some people may find it hard to concentrate for a long time without a break. This may also cause problems if you work, depending on the nature of your job. Find out more about your right to be treated fairly at work on page 5.

**Can fatigue be treated?**
Although it’s natural to associate any health problems with Parkinson’s, there may be other causes of fatigue that are unrelated to your condition. These may include anaemia and diabetes.

Because of this, it is important to discuss any feelings of fatigue with your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse (if you have one). Together, you can look at what the cause of your fatigue is and discuss treatment options.

While fatigue is common in Parkinson’s, it can sometimes be overlooked by doctors, but it is important that it is managed properly.

If your feelings of fatigue are related to other Parkinson’s symptoms, it may be helped with Parkinson’s medication. This will also help you manage your symptoms better, so you have more energy to do things that may otherwise be difficult.

It might be possible to manage fatigue with medication, but this is not always successful. We recommend that you discuss medication carefully with your GP or specialist. In some cases non-drug treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy may be more appropriate.

It is important, however, to realise that fatigue in Parkinson’s may not be related simply to tremor, stiffness or involuntary movements. It can often be related to more complex difficulties such as sleep disturbance or depression. If this is the case Parkinson’s medication may not help – but there are other things you may be able to do about these problems.

“...My employers were very helpful when I told them I had Parkinson's. My work area was adapted to make it more comfortable for me. I could sometimes get tired during the afternoon, so I was often free to leave and continue working at home if I wanted to.”

David, diagnosed in 2007
Fatigue can often trigger a cycle in which you become less and less active. If you are easily exhausted by some activities, you may become less likely to do them. This can start a vicious circle – the less active you are, the weaker your muscles become and so the more tired you’ll feel.

Fatigue is not just physical. It can also have an effect on your mental and emotional health. If you become less interested in doing any kind of activity, you may increasingly choose to stay at home rather than go out. You may then find that you get bored easily, may have fewer topics of conversation with family and friends, and may be more prone to depression.

Because of this, it is important to keep active, both physically and mentally. Increasing the amount you do may be difficult at first, but you will begin to see the long-term benefits of staying as active as possible.

**What can I do about fatigue?**

Some of the main causes of fatigue, such as sleep disturbance, depression or Parkinson’s symptoms, can be treated medically. But there are a number of things you can do yourself to try to avoid fatigue or help minimise it.

**At work**

If you are working, it may not be easy to rearrange your daily tasks. Instead, try to take regular, short breaks. This can help you work better 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 booklet *Employment and Parkinson’s.*

**Around the home**

If you live with someone, it may be useful to divide household tasks, so that you do the jobs you can manage more easily. It may also be useful to remember that household appliances, such as microwaves or remote controls, can save you a lot of time and effort.

**Exercise**

Try to get some regular exercise. This may seem difficult at first, but your stamina will build up over time. Mental exercise is also important, so try and stay involved with any 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 are eating the right 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. It is also important to try to avoid constipation (when stools are hard and difficult to pass), as this can make you feel sluggish. Ask your GP or Parkinson’s nurse if you need help managing constipation.

**Find out more:** see our booklets *Parkinson’s and diet* and *Looking after your bladder and bowels when you have Parkinson’s.*

**Daily routine**

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

Above all, know your limitations. Of course 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 are feeling fatigued, it may not help to try to force too much into one time period.

You may find that even after a good night’s rest you are feeling more tired and less energetic than usual. This may be due to having overworked the day before or it may simply be due to the way your condition fluctuates. Whatever the cause, keep in mind that you will have days when you feel tired and days when you feel better than usual.

Remember, your fatigue won’t go away overnight, but with time and consideration, you should be able to recognise what you can do and when you may have difficulty. You can then plan your time so that episodes of fatigue are minimised or managed, and if you are on medication, the times when it is most effective. You could try keeping a diary – it may help you to arrange to do more difficult daily tasks when you are less tired and moving around is easier.

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

Find out more: see our information sheet *Keeping a diary: people with Parkinson’s.*

**Sleep and night-time problems**

Many people with Parkinson’s can experience problems with sleeping at night, which can often leave you feeling tired and lethargic during the day. You may wake up during the night because of tremor or stiffness, or because you are having difficulty turning over in bed. You may also be waking up in the night because you need to go to the toilet.

If you are having any of these problems, you may not feel very well rested in the morning. If you haven’t had much sleep you may not be able to complete tasks so well the next day. Night-time problems will also contribute to excessive daytime sleepiness but frequent napping during the day can make sleeping at night more difficult.

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

You could try to develop good sleeping habits by having a regular bedtime and sleeping hours. Relaxing before you go to bed, by doing things like taking a warm bath, can also help. Stimulants such as alcohol, tobacco and caffeine should be avoided in the evenings.

Find out more: see our information sheet *Sleep and night-time problems in Parkinson’s.*

**Depression**

Many people with Parkinson’s experience depression at some point during the course of their condition, even if they are not formally diagnosed as having it.

Depression involves more than just feeling ‘down’ for a short while. A person who is depressed can experience a range of symptoms as well as low mood for long periods of time. These include fatigue, which is presented as tiredness, difficulty sleeping and a lack of interest or pleasure in their usual activities.

Having the above symptoms doesn’t necessarily mean that someone is depressed, however. This is particularly true for people with Parkinson’s, as Parkinson’s symptoms can overlap with those of depression.
If you have fatigue and are concerned about depression, speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse. If you are diagnosed with depression, there are effective treatments available. They may involve a combination of medication, talking therapies or counselling.

**Find out more:** see our information sheet *Depression and Parkinson’s*.

**Apathy**
Fatigue may also imitate a condition known as apathy, which is being increasingly recognised in Parkinson’s. It can lead to a loss of interest in activities that someone has previously enjoyed. Apathy, like depression, needs to be diagnosed so it can be treated. You may find it helpful to speak to a mental health specialist or counsellor about it. Apathy may also be linked to an inability to experience pleasure.

**Measuring fatigue**
We have a non-motor symptoms questionnaire available to help you and your healthcare professional assess symptoms such as fatigue.

You can download the questionnaire from our website [parkinsons.org.uk/publications](http://parkinsons.org.uk/publications) or order a copy from our distributor – see page 8 for details.

**Your rights at work – The Equality Act 2010**
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 a little extra rest time, either at a regular times each day or whenever necessary.

There is similar equality legislation in Northern Ireland. For details visit [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)
If you are a member of a trade union, your union 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. This can be paid to people who are in work, as well as to people who are not in work.

To find out more about your rights under The Equality Act 2010 or to speak to someone about welfare benefits, call our dedicated benefits and employment adviser on our helpline on **0808 800 0303**.

**Find out more:** see our booklet *Employment 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 a 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.

**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**. We run a peer support service if you’d like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson’s who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline to talk to someone about being matched with a volunteer.

Our helpline can also put you in touch with one of our local information and support workers, who provide 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](http://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](http://parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)

You can also visit [parkinsons.org.uk/forum](http://parkinsons.org.uk/forum) to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

**Thank you**

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

Gina Robinson, Parkinson’s Nurse, Sunderland Royal Hospital

Paul Reading, Consultant Neurologist, James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson’s who provided feedback.
Fatigue and Parkinson's (2014)

If you have comments or suggestions about this information sheet, we’d love to hear from you. This will help us ensure that we are providing as good a service as possible. We’d be very grateful if you could complete this form and return it to Resources and Diversity, Parkinson’s UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ. Or you can email us at publications@parkinsons.org.uk. Thanks!

Please tick...

☐ I have Parkinson’s. When were you diagnosed? .................................................................
☐ I’m family/a friend/a carer of someone with Parkinson’s
☐ I’m a professional working with people with Parkinson’s

Where did you get this information sheet from?

☐ GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse ☐ Information and support worker
☐ Parkinson’s UK local group or event ☐ Ordered from us directly
☐ Our website ☐ Other ...........................................................................................................

How useful have you found the information sheet? (1 is not useful, 4 is very useful) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

Have you found the publication easy to read/use? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Has this resource given you information that might help you manage your condition better?

☐ NA ☐ It hasn’t helped ☐ It has helped a little ☐ It has helped a lot

What aspects did you find most helpful? ...........................................................................................................................
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Do you have any other comments? .................................................................................................................................
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If you would like to become a member of Parkinson’s UK, or are interested in joining our information review group, please complete the details below and we’ll be in touch.

☐ Membership ☐ Information review group (who give us feedback on new and updated resources)

Name ........................................................................................................................................................................................
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What is your ethnic background? ☐ Asian or Asian British ☐ Black or Black British ☐ Chinese ☐ Mixed
☐ White British ☐ White other ☐ Other (please specify) ........................................................................................................
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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 020 7932 1303 or visit our website at parkinsons.org.uk/support. Thank you.

Parkinson’s UK
Free* confidential helpline 0808 800 0303
Monday to Friday 9am–8pm, Saturday
10am–2pm. Interpreting available.
Text Relay 18001 0808 800 0303
(for textphone users only)
hello@parkinsons.org.uk
parkinsons.org.uk
*calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

How to order our resources
0845 121 2354
resources@parkinsons.org.uk
Download them from our website
at parkinsons.org.uk/publications

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and will 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.

References for this information sheet can be found in the Microsoft Word version at parkinsons.org.uk/publications

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