

Hep C factsheets

Fatigue



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The cause of the fatigue experienced in hep C has not been fully determined. There are probably multiple contributing factors and no single factor can easily be studied without the influence of other factors. Also, the mechanism of how a disease state causes fatigue is not clearly understood.

In chronic hepatitis any number of metabolic processes could be interfered with, resulting in the escape of toxic substances into the body. It has not been proven but fatigue symptoms have been seen to respond favourably to diets and herbal treatments which address this sort of toxic overload.

Introduction

The majority of people who have hepatitis C (hep C) may at some stage experience fatigue. It is not unusual, though, for anyone to experience periods of fatigue whether they have hep C or not. These periods of fatigue may be due to a busy lifestyle, stress or other factors.

General fatigue

Fatigue can be described as feelings of excessive tiredness or lack of energy. The mildest form is where fatigue is experienced only through over-exertion or lack of rest, and responds well to rest. In its severe form, fatigue occurs at any time and does not respond to rest.

Factors that are believed to contribute to general fatigue include:

- Poor sleep and lack of rest
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Poor diet
- Stress and anxiety
- Over-active immune system

Management of fatigue

For anyone who has hep C, validation of fatigue symptoms is very important. An explanation as to why fatigue is experienced often relieves the stress caused by it to a certain degree. It is also important to remember that alcohol, drug use, poor rest and poor lifestyle will potentially contribute to increased fatigue.

As well as adopting lifestyle changes to maximise individual wellbeing and health, there are a number of tips to best manage the fatigue state so that the normal activities of daily living can be achieved without as much effort.

Experiencing fatigue over a period of time can impact on many areas of life such as relationships, work, recreation or other activities. The management of fatigue may require some readjustment and professional help. In some cases it is important to consider some type of counselling support to assist in managing the fatigue which can cause people to feel quite depressed.

Simple ideas to help recapture some energy

- Balancing your daily activities is very important. Try to avoid overloading your day, work at the time of the day when you feel your best and arrange to do things then.
- Sit down to iron or shower for example, so you are not having to support yourself.
- Use equipment if it helps save energy, e.g. use a washing trolley instead of carrying the washing to the clothes line.
- Have the most commonly used items in the kitchen at waist height so you don't have to bend or reach which takes more energy.
- Rather than trying to sleep when you are fatigued, rest or do a lighter, easier activity as you will regain more energy from this sort of break.
- Pace yourself, give yourself timeout, have regular breaks in your day and prioritise your activities into what you need to do over what you think you have to do.
- Fatigue does not mean you cannot or should not exercise. Exercise can be invigorating and strengthening. Speak to a physiotherapist or your GP about an appropriate exercise plan for you.
- Avoid big heavy meals, take smaller meals without rushing and give your body time to concentrate on the digestive process before undertaking any activity.
- Try not to have very hot showers, as this can be tiring. Also make sure the room is well ventilated otherwise the steamy humid environment can contribute to fatigue.
- Try to establish pre-sleep routine at night. For example, have a quiet time, a warm drink, wind down and prepare your body for sleep.
- An occupational therapist can help provide more ideas.

Also see

Complementary medicines (factsheet)

Dealing with stress (factsheet)

Diet and staying healthy (factsheet)

Complementary and alternative therapies for hepatitis C (booklet)

- This factsheet was abridged from *Fatigue Facts*, a brochure compiled by HepCare, the Hepatitis C Case Management Trial carried out in Northern Sydney Area Health Service, 1999.