



Fatigue and IBD

Patient Information Sheet

Fatigue is one of the most troublesome symptoms of IBD. It greatly limits work and social activities and can often prevent you from completing even basic everyday routines. It can also be a major contributing factor towards low mood in people with IBD. In some people, abnormal fatigue may also be a symptom of a flare coming, so can be used as a warning sign of an imminent flare-up.

Reasons for Fatigue

Fatigue stems from a variety of causes and treating each in turn can make a big difference to your quality of life. IBD associated fatigue can be due to:

Pain - can cause fatigue or interrupted sleep. Treating the pain associated with IBD will help.

Anaemia - is where the red blood cell count (or haemoglobin levels) are low resulting in tiredness. Malabsorption of vitamins and minerals is common in IBD, and without enough iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12, the body can't make more red blood cells. Treating the cause of the anemia, by stopping the bleeding or supplementing with iron or vitamin B, would be the best course of action to treat anemia associated with IBD.

Disturbances in sleep - when you have IBD during a flare up, your sleep may be interrupted by trips to the bathroom, pain or night sweats. The way to manage this is to treat the flare-up.

Side effects to medication - some medications that are used to treat IBD can cause fatigue either directly or indirectly by negatively affecting your sleep. Corticosteroids, such as prednisone, can cause nightmares and tend to give people the feeling of being "wired," which makes it difficult to get rest. Other medications may cause drowsiness or fatigue.

Change in mood (or unhappiness) - depression is not uncommon in people with chronic health conditions and can make getting to sleep and staying asleep difficult.

Stress levels - if too high they can commonly trigger fatigue. You need to find ways of managing and reducing your stress levels. High levels of stress can also trigger flare ups.

As a result of disease activity such as a flare up - The body fights the inflammation in various ways, using the body's resources, with the end result being fatigue.

Managing fatigue

Practicing good sleep hygiene - may also be helpful in achieving that good night's sleep. Try not to turn too many lights on when you get up, it will only wake you up further. Have a change of clothes and bedding close at hand, as well as some cold water to drink.

Gentle physical exercise - Exercise can tire the body and improve the quality of sleep, but avoid exercise at least 3 – 4 hours before bed.

If you suspect that you may have **depression**, you need to discuss this with your GP or another health professional that can assess advice and treat you.

Always try to **set yourself achievable goals**.

Consider lifestyle modifications. If you consume too many caffeinated or alcoholic drinks your ability to fall or stay asleep may be affected, especially if you consume them close to your bedtime

Planning your week so that you can set aside periods of where you can get rest and minimise the effects of fatigue.

You may want to **reduce activity levels whilst suffering from fatigue** but it is important to slowly and gradually increase activity levels again, to allow you to feel you have more energy over time.

Try **relaxation techniques** if you have trouble getting to sleep. Take some time for yourself such as read a book or have a bath to try to help you relax.