

# TIREDNESS AND FATIGUE

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

# **This Essential Guide is about tiredness and fatigue.**

## **It explains:**

- Why you might feel tired or have fatigue if you have a chest, heart or stroke condition
- How tiredness and fatigue can affect you
- How to cope with tiredness and fatigue and save energy

# Tiredness, fatigue and long-term health conditions

Everyone feels tired sometimes. Usually after some rest or sleep you feel better.

However, living with a **long-term health condition** can cause fatigue and make you feel tired a lot of the time. You may have little energy or motivation to do everyday tasks.

Many people who are living with a chest or heart condition, or who have had a stroke, experience tiredness and fatigue. This can have a big impact on your daily life, work and relationships.

However, there are many things you can do to help manage your tiredness and fatigue, and save your energy.

# What is fatigue?

Fatigue is the name given to extreme tiredness. It is different from normal tiredness. If you have fatigue, you can feel tired all of the time and very low in energy, even after you rest or sleep.

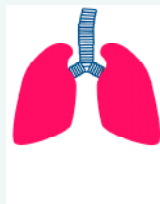
Fatigue affects everyone differently. It can affect you both physically and mentally. For some people, their fatigue is mild and does not have a big impact on their daily life. For others, fatigue can affect how well they are able to cope on a daily basis.



Where this guide talks about tiredness, the information also applies to fatigue.

# Why do I feel so tired?

If you have a long-term **chest condition**, damage to your lungs means less oxygen is getting into your blood. This can make you feel tired, even when you do just small amounts of activity.



Fatigue is one of the most common effects of a **stroke**. This can be due to the physical and emotional changes caused by a stroke and is called **post-stroke fatigue**. For some people, post-stroke fatigue improves over time.



If you have **heart failure**, extreme tiredness is common. If your heart is not pumping properly, less blood and oxygen are getting to your muscles. This can also make you feel more tired.



# Other reasons you might feel tired

## Physical factors

- After a stroke or heart attack, your body and brain need extra energy to recover and heal. This can leave you feeling very tired.
- Having difficulty sleeping can make you feel more tired.
- Your condition might mean you need to learn to do things in a new way and adjust to a new routine. This can be tiring both physically and mentally.

## Emotional factors

- It is normal for people living with a long-term health condition to sometimes feel stressed, angry, frustrated or depressed. Feeling like this can make you feel more tired. It can also affect your sleep.

## Your medication

- Tiredness can be a side effect of medication.
- If you think your medicines are making you feel tired, discuss this with your doctor. They may be able to change your medication to something that works better for you.



Never stop taking medication without your doctor's advice. Speak to your doctor first before making any changes.

## Other medical causes

- Sometimes your tiredness can be made worse by other medical causes - for example, if your iron levels are low.
- Discuss your tiredness with your doctor to find out if there is anything else that might be making you tired. You may be able to get treatment to help with this.

# How tiredness can affect you

Tiredness affects everyone differently.

Examples of how tiredness can affect you:

## Relationships

Feeling less motivated to spend time with others or do things you usually enjoy.





## Physical affects

Feeling weak, low in energy or dizzy.



## Thoughts and feelings

Having difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions and staying motivated.



## Daily life

Having difficulty doing everyday tasks like washing, dressing or cooking.



# What can I do to feel less tired?

There are lots of things you can do to help manage your energy levels and feel less tired.

## Keep active

If you feel very tired, you might not feel like doing any physical activity or exercise. It is also common to feel worried or anxious that being more active will make you feel more tired. However, regular physical activity can actually give you **more energy** and make you feel **less tired** in the long run. These benefits increase the more activity you do.



## **Keeping active helps with tiredness because it:**

- Increases the blood flow around your body
- Helps oxygen get to your muscles to help them work better
- Is good for your body and mind

If you find doing a lot of activity makes you very tired, try breaking it up into smaller amounts. For example, instead of a 15-minute walk, do 3 walks of 5 minutes each and spread them out across your day. You will still get the health benefits but may not feel as tired.

Speak to your doctor or nurse about how to keep active in a way that is safe and right for you. It can also help to talk to them about any worries you may have about how being active might affect your tiredness.

## Get enough sleep

Sleeping well can help you feel less tired. It can also help with your recovery and healing, your mood and memory.

### Tips for getting a good sleep:

Relax before bed by having a bath, reading a book or listening to the radio.

Be 'screen free' for at least 1 hour before bed – no TV, phone or computer.

Go to bed at the same time every night.

Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and not too hot or too cold.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine near bedtime.

## Maintain a healthy weight

If you are overweight, your body has to work harder. This can make you feel more tired. Losing weight can help you feel less tired and increase your energy levels.

Being a healthy weight can also reduce your risk of other health problems that add to tiredness.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet, combined with regular physical activity, is the best way to lose weight and keep it off.

## Eat well and avoid caffeine

Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help you feel less tired.



### **A healthy, balanced diet is:**

- High in fruit, vegetables, fibre, nuts, whole grains and pulses
- Low in saturated fat, salt and sugar

To help keep your energy up, avoid high-sugar snacks and eating large meals. Also try to avoid skipping meals.

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, energy drinks and some energy pills. Caffeine can give you a short energy boost, but can make you feel even more tired later on. It can also affect your sleep.

Try to avoid caffeine and choose decaffeinated drinks instead.

# Find out what makes you more tired

Knowing what makes you feel more tired can help you to manage your tiredness.



## **It can help to keep a diary of how you feel through the week.**

Keep a note of the things that make you feel more tired or less tired. For example:

- Activities
- Food
- Times of the day
- Days of the week

Use the diary to look for any patterns. Once you better understand what makes you feel more or less tired, you can start to make changes to your routine.

## Plan ahead and pace yourself

Be realistic about what you can and can't fit into a day.

Plan your activities for when you feel less tired – for example, you might feel better in the morning rather than the afternoon.

Spread out tasks that make you feel more tired across your day and week.

Give yourself plenty of time to do activities.

Take breaks between activities and have a short nap if you need it.

Don't be too hard on yourself and accept that some days will be better than others.

**Pushing yourself too hard when you have energy can leave you feeling more tired later on. Try to find a balance between doing things when you do have energy but not overdoing it.**



## Find time to relax

Reducing stress and feeling relaxed can help you feel less tired.



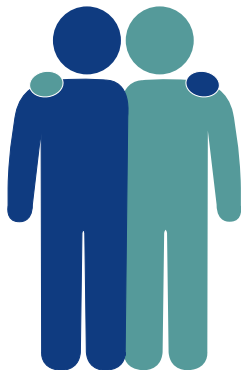
Try to make time for the things you enjoy. This might be going for a walk, listening to music or spending time with friends.



## Ask for help if you need it

Asking for help can be hard, but telling people how you feel can help to reduce stress. It also lets people know you need some extra support.

It's OK to tell your friends and family when you are feeling tired and what they can do to help.



# Energy saving tips



## Around the house

Sit down for as many activities as possible – for example, when you are getting dressed or folding clothes.

Keep things you need close by to avoid extra walking or carrying.

Wear clothes that are easy to put on and take off.

Spread household chores out over the week. Do a little each day, ask for help from family or friends or hire a cleaner if you can.

Sit down when you are preparing food.

Cook simple, easy meals to reduce the time you spend in the kitchen.

Prepare extra quantities and freeze meals for later.

Leave dishes to soak so they are easier to wash. Then leave them to drip dry.

## Shopping

Go shopping at quiet times of the day - avoid early evenings and weekends if you can.

Make a shopping list before you go and remember to take it with you.

Ask someone to go with you for extra help if you need it.

Do your shopping online if you can and have it delivered at a time that suits you.

## At work

Discuss possible changes with your employer, for example taking short breaks through the day.

If you drive, park as close to work as possible.

Work from home if you are able.

Reduce your hours if you can.

# Getting help

There are lots of different kinds of support that can help you better manage your tiredness.

## Help from family and friends

If you can, it is important to ask for help when you need it.



It can help your family and friends to better understand your tiredness if you explain how it affects you.



Tell them what will help you most – for example, keeping visits and phone calls short.



Keep a list of what you might need help with and accept help when it is offered.



## Help and support can also come from:


- Exercise groups
- Local peer support groups
- Relaxation and mindfulness programmes
- Equipment and aids to help with daily living
- One-to-one counselling


Social services may also be able to arrange help for you in your home with things like cooking and cleaning.




Speak to your doctor or nurse or call the **Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses** on **0808 801 0899** for more information on local support that may be available to you.


# Myths and Facts


 Fatigue and tiredness are the same thing - **MYTH**


 Everyone gets tired but usually we feel better after a rest or sleep. Fatigue is more complicated. The effects of fatigue can be felt even after rest or sleep - **FACT**


 Exercising when I'm tired will make me feel worse - **MYTH**

 It is important to pace yourself, but regular exercise or physical activity actually gives you more energy and helps you to feel less tired. Just a 15 minute walk can give you an energy boost, even when you are feeling tired - **FACT**


 People will know when I'm tired and when I need help - **MYTH**

 Tiredness and fatigue are often invisible. People may not know when you are feeling tired. It can help to tell them how you are feeling, what makes you more tired and how they can help - **FACT**

 When I am feeling tired, a strong coffee or an energy bar will make me feel much better - **MYTH**

 The caffeine in coffee and sugar in an energy bar may give you a quick energy boost but can make you feel even more tired later on - **FACT**

 My medication is making me tired so I should stop taking it - **MYTH**

 You should never stop taking your medication suddenly without your doctor's advice. Speak to your doctor first before making any changes - **FACT**

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For free, confidential advice and support from our **Advice Line nurses**, call: 0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-4pm), text: NURSE to 66777 or email: [adviceline@chss.org.uk](mailto:adviceline@chss.org.uk).

Across Scotland, over one million people – that's one in five of us – are living with the effects of a chest, heart or stroke condition. We are here to help everyone who needs us. But we need your support to do this. Go to **[www.chss.org.uk/supportus](http://www.chss.org.uk/supportus)** to find out how you can help more people in Scotland.

**If you would like this resource in an alternative format, please contact our Advice Line nurses.**

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