

Fatigue & Long Covid



Introduction to Long Covid fatigue

- Fatigue is a common symptom of Long Covid.
- Fatigue after Covid may be temporary, or it may last a long time.
- Fatigue is not just tiredness, but a range of physical and cognitive symptoms.
- These slides contain information on what fatigue is and how to manage it.



What is fatigue?



What is fatigue?

- Fatigue is not just “being tired”.
- The causes of chronic fatigue are not entirely clear. It seems to be a combination of strain and trauma from illness and long-term inflammation which affects how your body produces energy.
- Fatigue means that you have less energy.
- Other symptoms of Long Covid may use more of your energy, so you have even less energy to work with.

Symptoms of fatigue

Fatigue can have a lot of symptoms, including:

- Tiredness that doesn't go away even when you rest
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Sleep problems – sleeping too much, struggling to sleep or broken sleep.
- Headaches, stiffness, and body pain
- Brain fog – problems with thinking, memory, or planning
- Emotional numbness or difficulty controlling your emotions
- Feeling like a weight is pressing down on you, or your limbs are heavy

Brain fog

“Brain fog” is a term used by people with fatigue for cognitive symptoms.

Brain fog can affect your memory, communication and thinking.

Brain fog usually occurs when you are especially tired and passes with time.



Descriptions from people with brain fog

Managing your fatigue



Managing your fatigue

You can help to manage your fatigue by:

- Pacing yourself and managing your energy
- Understanding what triggers your fatigue
- Maintaining a day-to-day routine
- Reducing stress and practicing mindfulness
- Managing your sleep

The following slides will explain these techniques in more detail.



Pacing and energy management

What is pacing?

- Both physical and mental activity can use up your energy, which is a limited resource when you have fatigue.
- Pacing is an approach to managing your fatigue where you focus on balancing what you do day-to-day.
- Pacing and prioritising your activities are the most important tool in managing your fatigue.
- Try to keep your activity to a consistent level from day to day, avoiding very busy days which can trigger symptoms to get worse.

Finding a baseline

- Pacing is easiest if you set a **baseline**. This is the amount of activity you can safely do every day without making your symptoms worse.
- You should try to keep below your baseline every day if possible.
- **It is better for your fatigue to do too little than too much.** You cannot beat your fatigue by force of will.
- To find a baseline, start out at **half** of what you can think you can do. See whether your symptoms are stable after **two weeks**.
- If your symptoms are stable, you can start slowly increasing your activity.

Energy diaries

Tracking your activity can make it easier to find and keep to a baseline.

- One option is to keep a colour-coded chart which you colour in based on how high-energy your activity was in that hour:
 - **Red** for high-energy activities like working out, doing chores, or working
 - **Yellow** for low-energy activities like reading a magazine or watching TV
 - **Green** for rest
 - **Blue** for sleep
- You can also keep a symptoms diary where you write down what you do in a day and how you feel.

Improving your sleep



Improving your sleep

Good sleep can help to reduce your symptoms of fatigue. You can help improve your sleep by:

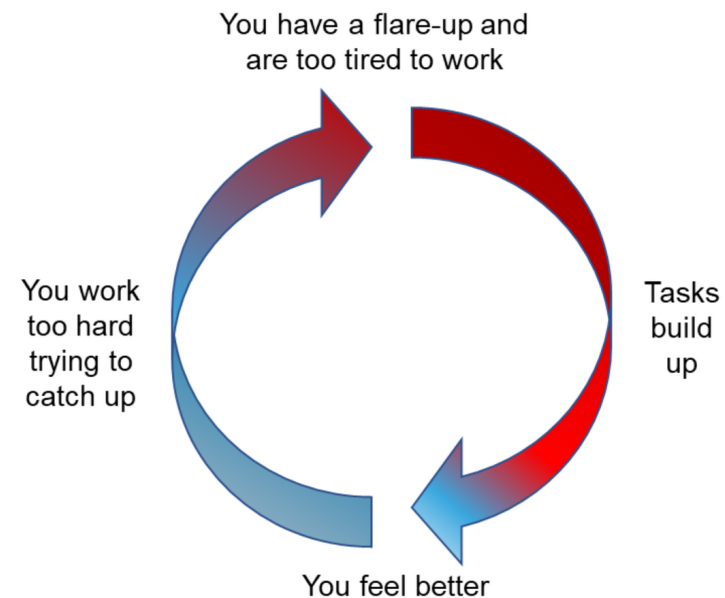
- Going to bed at the same time every night.
- Relaxing/winding down before bed. Ideally, build a daily bedtime routine.
- Avoiding screens for at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.
- Ensuring your bedroom is dark, comfortable, and quiet.
- Avoiding caffeinated drinks and high-sugar foods in the afternoons and evenings.
- Practicing mindfulness or meditation exercises before bed.



Preparing for flare-ups

Symptoms flare-ups

- Symptoms flare-ups are a common part of fatigue. This is where your symptoms get much worse for a period of time.
- This can be caused by stress, over-activity, or illness.
- When your symptoms flare up, this can become a vicious cycle called “boom and bust” (see diagram)



Preparing for symptoms flare-ups

There are things you can do to be ready for symptom flare-ups:

- Have ready-made or easy-to-cook food in stock, for days when cooking is more than you can manage.
- Keep some high-energy snacks nearby, in case you can't get to the kitchen.
- Keep water and any medication you may need within reach of your bed.
- If you live alone, ask a friend or family member to call in regularly to check on you if they don't hear from you.
- Discuss work leave arrangements in advance, if necessary.



Further information & support

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Information and Support

Advice Line Nurse Services: a free, confidential service providing nursing support and information. Available Monday to Friday 9.30am-4pm.

Telephone: 0808 8010899

Email: advice@chss.org.uk

Text: NURSE to 66777

Health Information Services have a range of up to date stroke publications and information leaflets, including work & financial support resources.

www.chss.org.uk

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The following organisations contributed to this presentation

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland

