

This leaflet will help you to manage your fatigue levels.
In order for the brain to heal it needs lots of rest.

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Fatigue is one of the most common complaints associated with brain injury. It will be most severe immediately following your brain injury and can improve with time. For some individuals, however, fatigue persists long after the other symptoms have disappeared.

Fatigue decreases your concentration, memory, and reduces your ability to cope with social interaction.

Fatigue will also increase your irritability, distractibility, depression, and anxiety.

If your brain is processing information slower it takes more energy to do things.



Tasks that require a lot of thinking and concentration will drain your 'brain energy' faster, leaving you feeling tired.

Fatigue is often aggravated when your sleep is poor. After a brain injury it is often difficult to get to sleep - or you wake and struggle to get back to sleep during the night and then feel unrefreshed in the morning.

Fatigue management is the starting point for your recovery. In order to manage your fatigue, you first need to accept that you do not have the same physical and mental stamina that you had before the accident.

Fatigue affects many factors that are important to your rehabilitation; therefore, the success of your rehabilitation programme will largely depend on how well you learn to manage your fatigue.



Often **fatigue** is connected to thinking and concentration tasks - you may find it is your brain that is tired rather than your body.

This may be due to:

- A lack of coordination and problems with balance and movement meaning actions take extra effort and concentration
- Your brain having to work harder because of concentration and memory problems
- Poor or interrupted sleep
- Boredom and depression
- Tinnitus – constant noise in the ears/head is very tiring for the brain

There may be swelling or bruising disrupting the way your brain works, making it less efficient, and it will use more energy to perform simple every day tasks causing you to feel more tired.

What can you do to help to reduce your fatigue?

- Try to restore a good sleep pattern - have good bedtime routines and try to get 8 - 10 hours sleep a night
- Schedule and prioritise rest breaks to recharge your energy before your 'batteries go flat' as once you are exhausted it may take days to restore your energy levels
- Balance high demand thinking tasks with some low energy activities. Don't expect your brain to be able to concentrate hard for hours initially - you will have to build up to that
- Learn to identify early warning signs of fatigue and rest accordingly
- Incorporate some physical activity under supervision or consultation with your doctor or rehab specialist
- Build relaxation time into your day
- Try meditation and correct breathing techniques

Rest and relaxation exercises will also help to reduce your stress related headaches.

Fatigue increases physical symptoms such as headaches and dizziness. You may be experiencing headaches daily or more than once a day. This is very common, particularly in the early stages of recovery. Your headaches may be caused by the initial bruising and swelling of the brain or because of an associated neck injury. Stress caused by worry, fatigue, and concentrating for too long may also produce headaches.

You will normally find that your headaches are worse when you are fatigued and the combined affect can be quite debilitating.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Some of the other leaflets in this series may help or you can contact your local Brain Injury Association, ACC, Ministry of Health or Disability Resources Information Centres.

For more information go to www.brain-injury.org.nz