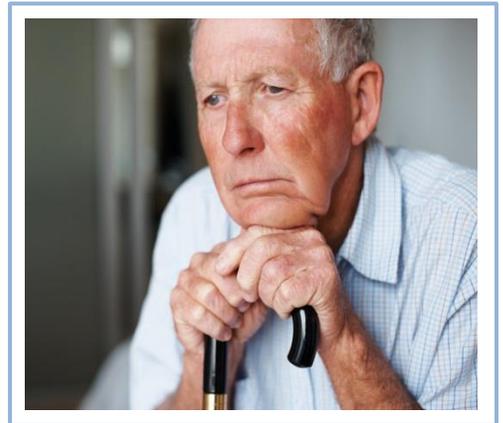


Feeling Tired After Stroke

You probably take activities like standing from a sitting position, walking or even just watching television for granted. After a stroke, these simple activities can drain your energy because of a common problem called **Post Stroke Fatigue**, or **PSF**.

PSF is defined as a period of time when you feel decreased energy and a need for more rest after minimal effort. Both the body and the brain are recovering from the damage caused by the stroke, and this recovery uses up a great deal of your energy. PSF affects up to 70percent of stroke survivors and varies from person to person in how long it lasts and how much it interferes with daily activities.



PSF makes it difficult to take part in daily life activities. You may feel physically tired, so that tasks you should be able to do easily become exhausting. Or you may feel mentally tired, making it hard to read a book, make a grocery list or follow a conversation. You may become tired or irritable after a quick trip to the grocery store, even though you were able to work eight hour days without difficulty before the stroke. In the early days after your stroke, you may find it difficult to do your rehabilitation therapies because you are too tired.

What increases my risk of Post Stroke Fatigue?

Although most stroke survivors experience some level of post stroke fatigue, there are some factors that make it more likely to experience PSF and to feel it more intensely.

Stroke Characteristics– The changes caused by your stroke and how severe those changes are may predict your risk of having PSF. In general, stroke causing multiple areas of problems will increase the risk of PSF.

- If you have had one or more strokes in the past, you may have more severe PSF.
- Strokes that lead to cognitive difficulties result in greater mental fatigue as well as physical fatigue.
- Strokes that result in loss of movement in the arm and/or leg will increase fatigue.
- Loss of vision or changes in vision make physical and mental tasks harder and increase fatigue.

Pre-stroke Fatigue– Patients who had a sedentary lifestyle or were experiencing fatigue even before a stroke will generally have greater PSF.

Age– The older you are when you have a stroke, the more likely you are to suffer from PSF.

Health Condition Before the Stroke–Having difficult diseases prior to having a stroke can lead to PSF. For example, if you suffer from arthritis, heart trouble, diabetes, or migraine headaches, PSF may be a greater problem.

What can I do about Post Stroke Fatigue?

The impact of fatigue on daily life should not be underestimated. Fatigue leads to:

- Poorer recovery from stroke due to reduced participation in therapies
- Cognitive difficulties such as reduced ability to concentrate, forgetfulness and slower response time
- Reduced participation in social activities, disengagement with others, isolation and loneliness
- Irritability and agitation, which then can lead to social isolation and depression
- Slower return-to-work
- Reduced quality of life because you don't participate in activities that bring joy such as playing with your children, reading a good book, or traveling

Although PSF can interfere with your recovery, interventions can improve your chances of regaining your energy level. Strategies to address PSF include lifestyle changes, education, rehabilitation and medication.

- Participate in your rehabilitation: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy all help your physical and mental endurance.
- Talk to your physician or therapists about an exercise plan. Staying active will build your endurance.
- Learn your fatigue patterns. Try keeping a written journal each day regarding when fatigue occurs and what you were doing at the time.
- Plan activities in advance and allow yourself more time to complete activities.
- Pace yourself based on your own strengths and weaknesses, and on the advice of your doctor and therapists. Resting for 20 to 30 minutes before you are tired can boost energy.
- Spend some quiet time resting between bigger, more demanding activities. You may take a short nap or just sit quietly, perhaps reading or listening to music or a TV program.
- Follow a nutritionist's advice for a healthy eating plan.
- Help educate your loved ones on what you're experiencing. They may not understand what you are going through because PSF is different from general fatigue.
- Try to maintain a regular schedule of going to bed and getting up in the morning with a goal of six to eight hours of sleep each night.
- Finally, talk with your physician or nurse about your medications. Some medications can lead to drowsiness or fatigue, and others may interfere with sleep. There are also medications that can treat the effects of PSF, so ask your physician about those as well.





Sleeping

Sleep issues are something that almost every stroke patient experiences. Sleep difficulties that existed before the stroke or new difficulties since the stroke could lead to post stroke fatigue.

A sleep-wake cycle disorder, also known as a Circadian rhythm disorder, is when the internal body clock is out of sync with natural light and dark cycles. Light affects sleep patterns by telling our bodies when to be tired and when to be alert. Light sends a signal through the eye to the brain to increase production of a chemical called melatonin when light is low. Melatonin is a hormone that causes drowsiness and naturally puts us to sleep. Artificial light from lamps or other electronic devices can interfere with this natural pattern and affect sleep.

Nighttime exposure to blue light disrupts our sleep hormones. Television, computer screens, and even digital clocks with blue numbers are all common sources of late night blue light that can affect our production of melatonin, making it harder to get normal sleep.

Causes of sleep-wake cycle disorders in stroke survivors include:

- Hospital routines that result in waking at night or sleeping during the day
- Changes in the balance of brain chemistry that interferes with resting
- Physical discomfort or pain from the stroke
- Changes in body temperature control due to the stroke
- Medication side effects

If you experience sleep issues following stroke, communicate with others about your problem. Talk with family members about respecting your need for a quiet environment to rest. They can help you create a more sleep friendly environment and help you get adjusted for better rest and sleep. Here are some other things you can do to promote restful sleep:

- Maintain a regular schedule of going to bed and getting up in the morning.
- Avoid long naps during the day longer than 30 minutes.
- Set a comfortable temperature in your bedroom.
- Avoid caffeine before bedtime.
- Don't sleep with the TV or computer screens on in your room.
- Get regular exercise to make you tired enough to sleep naturally.

Natural restful sleep is important to your stroke recovery. If you are still having trouble getting the rest you need, talk with your doctor about other solutions, possibly including medications, which might help you.

For more stroke information, visit
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