

Minimizing Fatigue

Although the course of ALS is unpredictable, fatigue is one outcome that is predictable, resulting from muscle weakness and spasticity. Fatigue can range from mild lethargy to extreme exhaustion. People often complain of tiredness, dwindling strength, and lack of energy. Despite the adverse effects of fatigue, symptoms can be minimized through effective management. By recognizing the signs of fatigue, knowing which factors worsen symptoms and learning how to conserve energy, people with ALS can greatly improve their quality of life.

Noticeable signs of fatigue:

Slower body movements	Slower speech responses	Dull tone of voice
Short answers	Lower voice volume	Shortness of breath
Increased sighing	Irritability	Decrease in food intake
Decrease in smiling	Disinterest in decision making	Preferring to be alone
Increase in forgetfulness	Lack of enjoyment in activities	Deterioration in appearance & grooming

Factors which may aggravate fatigue:

Immobility	Overexertion	Sleep disruption	Financial Difficulties
Protein malnutrition	Pain	Anxiety	Inaccessible home
Medications	Breathing weakness	Excessive weight loss	Grief
Stress	Alcohol	Hopelessness	Extreme temperatures
Smoking			

Strategies to minimize fatigue:

1. Use assistive equipment when needed. Use of raised toilet seat, bath bench, reacher and wheelchairs will save energy on a daily basis.
2. Learn to simplify tasks. See an Occupational Therapist for determining what is best for your needs.
3. Plan your day and pace your activities. Plan only 1 major outing or visit per day when needed.
4. During a task, stop and rest. Use both hands when needed and sit rather than stand whenever possible. Take a few breaths before you start your task again.
5. Make your living environment accessible for daily activities and promote energy conservation by keeping pathways open & clear. Move a bed to the main floor to eliminate the need to navigate steps and have needed assistive equipment on hand.
6. General Tips: Delegate some tasks, use the internet for shopping, accept offers of assistance from others, use electrical tools (shaver, can opener, toothbrush), slide objects along counters, keep frequently used items within easy reach, use a handicapped parking sticker.
7. Try to establish a regular sleeping pattern. If you have problems waking up at night, determine why and what to do about it.
8. Avoid prolonged bathing in warm water, as it may worsen muscle fatigue. Be cautious of extreme outdoor temperatures.
9. Maintain your nutritional requirements each day, and prevent unnecessary weight loss. You may need to consult with a dietitian.

10. Avoid stressful situations. Understanding fatigue will help family members cope better with emotional upsets, realizing they are not personal attacks, but normal responses to fatigue.

Effective management of fatigue will maximize your wellness and abilities for living with ALS.
Although you can't take away the fatigue, you can learn to manage the fatigue and not let it manage you.