

OVERCOMING FATIGUE

Most people are aware that pain and stiffness are symptoms of arthritis. But many people — even people who experience it — might not realize that their low energy and fatigue are also part of living with the disease.

Feeling tired can make it difficult to concentrate. It can also make pain harder to deal with and can sometimes leave you feeling helpless.

When you already feel tired and overwhelmed it can be challenging to take action and do things that will help increase your energy and minimize fatigue. But you've already started! This information will help you find ways to feel better and get back to active living.

You don't need to read it all at once. As you will encounter along the way, pacing yourself and breaking activities down into manageable chunks are helpful ways to approach anything you do — and that includes learning.

"This online course about managing fatigue is an excellent, convenient and accessible way to improve your quality of life — right from the comfort of your home. Each module helps you, step by step, learn about fatigue and how to assess your activities to make positive changes in your day to day routines to function better with less frustration."

Ilene, Occupational Therapist with extensive experience in the management of arthritis

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WHAT IS FATIGUE?



We all feel tired after a long day, but when you have a long-term medical **condition such as arthritis, you may experience tiredness that's quite different in quality and intensity — fatigue is the feeling that you need to rest even before you start an activity.**

In this section, we'll learn about the relationship between arthritis and fatigue, its sources, and strategies to help reduce your fatigue.

Remember though, that even when you do everything right, you may still lack the energy to follow through with planned activities.

Sometimes you will need to say "no" and be gentle with yourself when you do. Setting limits for yourself in the short term can potentially lead to improved quality of life in the long term.

The Definition of Fatigue

According to the Mayo Clinic, "Nearly everyone is overtired or overworked from time to time. Such instances of temporary fatigue usually have an identifiable cause and a likely remedy. Unrelenting exhaustion, on the other hand, lasts longer, is more profound and isn't relieved by rest. It's a nearly constant state of weariness that develops over time and reduces your energy, motivation and concentration. Fatigue at this level impacts your emotional and psychological well-being, too."

Reference : <https://www.mayoclinic.org/symptoms/fatigue/basics/definition/sym-20050894>.

Fatigue is different from ordinary tiredness in that it can last for days, weeks or even months and **doesn't necessarily improve with more sleep or less activity.** Sometimes people who have not experienced fatigue may mistake it for tiredness and may not understand the ways in which it can impact an individual with arthritis.

"My fatigue can be so all- consuming at times and I get emotional when I see people out running/jogging and being super physically active... it reminds me that I have limitations to my daily. When you have arthritis, fatigue makes you feel like you are a plug pulled out of the electrical socket."

Allan, individual living with RA



FATIGUE: CAUSES AND EFFECTS



What causes fatigue?

Pinpointing the source of fatigue can be difficult, because so many of the things that cause it are interconnected. For example:

- Lack of sleep can cause fatigue, but your lack of sleep may be caused by pain. So, is pain the problem, or is it the amount of sleep?
- A poor diet can cause fatigue, but perhaps part of the reason you aren't eating well is that you're too tired to make healthy meals.
- Not enough physical activity and exercise can cause low energy, but overworking yourself either physically or mentally can cause fatigue.

References: Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program and Arthritis Research UK

SOURCES OF FATIGUE



You can download this diagram to help you remember all the factors that cause fatigue.

<https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/756f918a-7cf3-47c1-87ab-351012366687/EN-sources-of-fatigue>

The Effects of Fatigue

Fatigue can have a major impact on your life. It can force you to stop what you're doing to rest, or make you change your plans. In some cases, ongoing fatigue can affect all aspects of your life, including employment, hobbies and relationships with your family and friends. Fatigue doesn't only affect you — when it's not in check you may be more irritable and short-tempered with loved ones. It can also discourage you from making plans to spend quality time with the people you care about, whether it's children, a spouse, other family members or friends.

Adapting to the New Normal

Dealing with the effects of fatigue can be a physical and emotional challenge. We may mourn the loss of our ability to do things the way we used to be able to do them or as often as we used to be able to do them. **It's okay to be sad and feel a sense of loss if arthritis causes us to change aspects of our life.** But it's also important to celebrate what is possible.

What does success look like for you at the moment? Is it doing one more exercise than you could yesterday? Is it finding time to catch up with a friend over the phone? Or maybe it's just making it through the day.

Whatever makes you feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in your new day-to-day, make sure to celebrate yourself when you are able to achieve this. **If you're feeling really blue and having a difficult time seeing positive things to celebrate, you may want to talk to your healthcare provider who can help you take care of your emotional health as well.** For further information, see our Mental Health & Well-Being learning module.

Fatigue Self-Test

This quick self-test "Are You Ready to Deal with Your Fatigue", will help you to measure your level of fatigue and how in control of it you feel. It's a good idea to take it now, print it and keep it somewhere handy so you can take it again a few months from now to see how you're doing.

<https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/f226917e-0fef-4919-b6a9-c1afa14f1cb5/EN-fatigue-quiz>

The screenshot shows a survey titled "ARE YOU READY TO DEAL WITH YOUR FATIGUE?". It includes instructions: "In order to understand your level of fatigue and how well prepared you are to deal with it, please answer these questions now and then keep a record and answer again in three months." Below this is a rating scale: "Rate each of your responses using a scale from 1-5, low to high." The scale has five points: 1 (Low), 2, 3, 4 (High). There are two date fields: "TODAY'S DATE:" and "DATE IN THREE MONTHS:". Under "TODAY'S DATE:", there is a row of numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 with "High" under 5. To the right of this is a question: "1. How much energy do you have for things you need or want to do?" Below this is another row of numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 with "High" under 5. To the right of this is another row of numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 with "High" under 5.

"This past week I've been exhausted all the time. I've been trying to go to bed at least an hour earlier and I am sleeping through the night. I wake up feeling pretty good, but by mid-morning I start to feel my energy seeping away and for several days I felt almost too tired to go home."

Rani, individual living with arthritis and working full time

THINGS THAT HELP WITH FATIGUE

We'll discuss each of these in more detail, but here's a handy cheat-sheet that you can print to act as a reminder of the things you can do to help when you're feeling fatigued.

Use this cheat sheet as a reminder for days when fatigue is getting you down.

https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/66b108e6-1fd9-4a9d-baa4-6ddf169dab5e/Things-that-might-help-with-fatigue_ENG

Balance Activities

When people feel fatigued, they often spend their energy on work and chores and give up things that they enjoy. Determine what has to be done now, what can wait, and what someone can help with, then try to schedule in some time for yourself and loved ones.

Make Sleep a Priority

Keep a regular schedule, and ban laptops, cell phones and other devices from your bedroom.

Increase Physical Activity

Starting small, increase the amount of physical activity or exercise you do. This will improve your general well-being, strength and energy levels.

Make Good Food Choices

Eating too little can cause fatigue but eating the wrong foods can also be a problem. Eating a balanced diet helps keep your blood sugar in a normal range and prevents that sluggish feeling when your blood sugar drops.

Stay Hydrated

Drink water to help control body temperature, remove waste and keep joints lubricated.

Address Depression

You may think of depression, stress and anxiety as emotional concerns, but they can contribute to many physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches and loss of appetite. If feelings of sadness, irritability or anxiety are becoming overwhelming, talk to your healthcare provider or a licensed therapist, who can help you look after your mental well-being.

Join a Support Group

Meet new people who share similar concerns and experiences, and who can share strategies.

STRIVING FOR BALANCE



Magazine articles often talk about 'finding balance' as if it was a stable, achievable state. In reality, balance is not a state you reach, but an ongoing activity. Just like a tightrope walker has to make constant tiny adjustments to stay balanced, so do we. Our lives are constantly changing and the effort to better balance our activities is an ongoing process.

This section provides you with techniques you can use to save energy, minimize your fatigue and do the things that are important to you.

PLANNING, PRIORITIZING, PACING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

The four Ps are key to balancing your activities. They are:

1. Planning
2. Prioritizing
3. Pacing
4. Problem-solving

THE FOUR Ps



Planning, prioritizing, pacing, problem-solving and pleasure will help you to make the most of your days.

1. Planning

We often start with whatever activities grab our attention or seem the most pressing, which can mean **that by the time we get around to the most important or enjoyable things, we've run out of steam.** Make a plan of the things you want to achieve during the day or over the week. Plan how and when **you're going to do certain tasks. Make sure that demanding jobs are spaced out during each day or week.**

"Making a schedule can be very helpful when you have many things you need to do. Putting items on a calendar can allow you to see when you will accomplish tasks and can make each day less overwhelming. It also will help you to stop making lists in your head while you are trying to sleep or throughout your day because 'to dos' are written down and the plan is clear."

Amanda, Occupational Therapist with extensive experience in the management of arthritis

2. Prioritizing

If you list the tasks you need to do, you can order them according to importance and decide what task you can remove, delay or delegate. Ask yourself the following:

- Does this all need to be done today?
- Does it need to be done at all?
- Can I break this up into more manageable chunks?
- Do I have to do it, or can someone else?
- Can I get someone to help me with parts of the task?



"I used to organize and cook huge dinners for my family celebrations. But it became too much. Now we have a new tradition called the potluck."

Teresa, living with arthritis

3. Pacing

Break your activities up into achievable parts and spread them throughout the day or week. When doing an activity, take short, regular breaks. Change your position **and activity regularly**. Don't wait until you are very tired as a guide for when to stop — plan ahead to change your activity or to rest before you start to feel tired.



"The warmth of the sun on my muscles feels great when I'm gardening. The time just flies by! But in order not to overdo it, I set a timer to remind me to take regular breaks."

Ann, living with arthritis

4. Problem-solving

Sometimes it's not what you do but the way you do it that makes a difference. Look at your daily routine. Start to notice if you spend all morning doing the same type of repetitive tasks, or if your working position causes you pain or discomfort. Perhaps your body complains when you have to perform certain tasks, or you get very tired by the afternoon. If something you are doing causes a problem, ask yourself if you can do it differently.



Our Daily Living learning module has lots of great tips on ways to do your daily activities with less wear and tear on your joints. <https://arthritis.ca/support-education/online-learning/daily-living>

"There are a lot of assistive devices out there that can help make tasks easier. I often tell clients that if there is something they are having difficulty doing, someone probably has invented something to make it easier. Thinking outside the box, exploring other options or seeking out devices to help can really decrease stress on joints and lessen the energy tasks take."

Amanda, Occupational Therapist with extensive experience in the management of arthritis

5. Pleasure

You may have found that fatigue has stopped you from doing the things you really want to, and that **can make you feel less like yourself. It's worth spending some time thinking what you could achieve** that would make you feel good. It might be regularly socializing with friends or getting back into a hobby.

Setting yourself small, weekly goals can help you build up to bigger things as you start managing **your fatigue. You're much more likely to meet small, specific goals, rather than unclear goals or ones that aim too high too soon.**

"When I know I have a busy day or week ahead I'll schedule more relaxing activities, such as quiet reading time, mindful meditation, gentle yoga or I'll book a spa service. Balancing and pacing activities is vital in managing my fatigue."

Sue, working full-time and **living with inflammatory arthritis**

KEEPING TRACK



The more information you have the easier it is to plan ahead. It can be difficult to know how much energy an activity takes — how much is too much? What are the biggest culprits when it comes to tiring you out? Tracking your activity for a week (or more) can help you figure it all out.

Start by printing the Activity Diary, or use your own day planner if you have one. <https://arthritis.ca/AS/media/pdf/Support%20and%20Education/EN-activity-diary.pdf>

Keep track of what you do during the day. And at the end of the day, colour in the activities according to how much energy they take.

RED = HIGH ENERGY

This will include physically challenging activities such as gardening or house cleaning, but it can also include mentally taxing activities like doing office work, and emotionally charged things like a family meeting or an argument.

YELLOW = LOW ENERGY

These are activities that don't use up a lot of energy. Remember that the same activity might be rated differently on different days — going for a stroll around the block on a good day might not take much energy — it might, in fact, give you extra energy. But on days when you're in a lot of pain, that same walk might fall in the red category.

GREEN = REST

Green activities could include reading, playing a game on your phone or watching TV — you're still awake, but your body has a chance to recover from more strenuous activity and won't be using much energy.

BLUE = SLEEP

We often think we get more sleep than we do on average. Keep track for a week or two and note if nights with less sleep lead to more stressful days.

X = FATIGUE

When your fatigue is very noticeable or you have to stop what you were doing to rest, mark it with a cross.

Review your Activity Diary

At the end of a week, look back at your diary and ask yourself these questions:

- Are there times when I was exhausted?
- Are these related to high-energy activities?
- Are there long blocks of high-energy activity with no breaks? Is my sleep disturbed? Am I getting enough?
- Am I sleeping the day away?
- Is there enough time for enjoyment and recovery?

Use the information to give you a better idea of when you need to pace yourself and to help you to prioritize your time. Try planning the next week and review your progress as you go.



SLEEP AND YOUR HEALTH



It will come as no surprise that the level of fatigue you feel during the day is greatly affected by how well you slept the night before. And the reverse is also true — the things you do during the day can affect how well you sleep at night.

This section will help you to understand the relationship between fatigue and sleep.

"I have been living with RA as well as OA for many years now. Falling asleep, even when physically tired used to be a big problem for me. I have learned to manage my sleep by going to bed at roughly the same time every night, by not consuming foods or drinks that contain caffeine after 1:00PM, and by using an herbal supplement every night. After a really busy or stressful day, I make sure to take a warm bath and/or listen to my CDs with nature sounds; they make me feel really peaceful."

Sabine, an active volunteer living with OA and RA

Sleep Deprivation

If you sleep fewer than seven hours per night, or if the quality of your sleep is poor, you might be sleep-deprived. While some people need less sleep than others, studies show getting less sleep than you need may negatively affect your health.

Being sleep-deprived is not just an inconvenience — it's a health risk. In the short term you are more prone to accidents. When sleep deprivation is ongoing, your health can suffer, as many of your body's systems need adequate sleep to function properly. If you are having sleep difficulties talk to your doctor. Your doctor can adjust your current medications if they are contributing to the problem, or provide you with treatments to help you sleep better.

Reference: [Seconds Count - Sleep and Cardiovascular Disease](#)

TIPS FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

SLEEP STRUGGLES?

Sleep difficulties can affect every aspect of your life and health. If you have trouble getting a good, restful sleep, consider these scientifically proven tips.

1. Keep a Regular Schedule

Experts recommend going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, including weekends. This may be **hard to stick to, but if you're** having trouble sleeping, a more regular schedule helps your body know when to expect sleep and get ready for it.



2. Unwind Before Bed

Imagine trying to put a toddler to bed right after playing an energetic game of tag. Getting that child ready to sleep would likely pose a challenge. Similarly, if you are involved in high energy activities right up until bedtime, it will take some **time for you to "switch off" and comfortably** prepare for sleep.



3. Turn Off the Screens

Some studies indicate that the bright light emitted by your phone, computer or TV can delay your body's readiness for sleep. Avoid screens for at least an hour before bedtime. Take a bath, do a crossword puzzle, or find another way to unwind.

4. Make it Routine

Listen to *A Walk Through the Forest*, Copyright 2013, Candi Raudebaugh, Inner Health Studio" <http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/>. Used with permission.

A regular bedtime routine can help signal to your body that it's time to sleep. Dim the lights, and engage in a relaxing activity like reading, listening to music or meditating. Try different things until you find the routine that is right for you, then stick to it. You may find listening to a guided relaxation exercise like the one above helpful.

5. Food and Physical Activity

Eating healthy food and getting regular exercise can assist with sleep. Exercise can help you to feel pleasantly tired and relaxed at the end of the day, but try not to do it within a few hours of bedtime. Find a form of exercise that works for you and enables you to be active without aggravating your arthritis.



6. Napping

Listen to your body — if you have a short nap in the afternoon and it gives you the energy to have a productive and enjoyable evening, go for it. But if you're having trouble sleeping at night, you may wish to avoid napping during the day — as tempting as it is. It can further disrupt your sleeping schedule.

"If I don't get at least 8 hours sleep, I will most definitely be affected by fatigue. When I am able, I'll try to get 9-10 hours which can greatly help... I'll need extra sleep when I am experiencing an 'arthritis flare' to help manage the fatigue even more. Incorporating some power breaks or naps in my day can help, as well as meditation and restful relaxation techniques."

Sue, living with inflammatory arthritis

7. Caffeine, Alcohol and Nicotine

Caffeine and alcohol can lead to poor quality sleep. Those who smoke tend to have more difficulty getting to sleep and wake up more often at night. Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening and limit alcohol intake. Talk to your healthcare provider if you need support to quit smoking or drinking alcohol.



8. Set the Scene

Some studies show that even a small amount of light can disturb sleep. Cover light sources and darken the room with black-out curtains to help promote longer sleep in the morning. If you're sensitive to noise, try wearing earplugs to reduce or eliminate sound or use a white noise machine or fan to mask noise.



The temperature should be comfortable enough to promote sleep. Some studies suggest a slightly cool room is most conducive to sleep. Open or close windows if necessary. Make sure **your mattress provides firm yet comfortable support. Use bedding and sleepwear that are** comfortable. If your living space allows for it, keep your bedroom for sleep and sexual activity only. That means no TV!

9. Mind Racing

If your thoughts keep you awake, keep a small notepad and pen by your bed to write them down. This will help ease your mind and to allow you to address the issues in the morning. **Many experts suggest that if you are having difficulty falling asleep** it is better to get up and go to another room to relax, meditate or read. Worrying about sleep can keep you awake, and you want to associate your bed with sleeping, not worrying.



10. Pain

If you have pain, speak to your doctor about taking a pain reliever before you go to bed and try to time it so that you could take another dose if the pain wakes you up at night.

References: Arthritis Research UK, Arthritis Foundation, The Arthritis Society, CBC.ca, National Sleep Foundation



KEEPING A SLEEP DIARY



If you're having a lot of difficulties sleeping, try keeping a [Sleep Diary](#). This will help you identify what the main issues are. If you plan to ask your doctor for help, bringing your sleep diary will show them the efforts you have made already to improve your sleep habits.
<https://arthritis.ca/AS/media/pdf/Support%20and%20Education/EN-sleep-diary.pdf>

The Sleep Diary will assist you to keep track of the amount and quality of sleep you are getting, what disturbed or delayed your sleep, and other factors associated with poor sleep.

A screenshot of a Sleep Diary form titled "SLEEP DIARY". The form includes instructions: "Complete this diary as many times as necessary until you are using it consistently and know its importance for others. Please complete the diary on a single-line basis over time. Record the following: DAY 1, DAY 2, DAY 3, DAY 4, DAY 5, DAY 6, DAY 7". Below the instructions, there are several questions with space for handwritten responses. These include: "The time you went to bed", "The number of times off sleep", "How far back did you sleep last night", "Time to fall asleep", "The amount of time you were awake", "The amount of time you were awake", "What did you do during the awake time", "How long did it take you to fall asleep again", "Any other problems of sleep", "Any other factors or circumstances", "Amount of liquids consumed before bed", "How long was your nap", "Any other factors or circumstances", "Any other factors or circumstances", "Amount of alcohol consumed before bed", "MFP - time of last meal", "Any other factors or circumstances", and "Your feelings and mood before bed".

EXERCISE? I'M EXHAUSTED!



Exercise is probably the last thing you want to do if **you're feeling fatigued**. While it's not suggested that you head for the gym when **you're exhausted**, research shows that adding more physical activity to your routine can decrease pain, increase overall energy levels and lift your mood. Start off with some easy activity and build your stamina over time. Beginning a new exercise routine may be **difficult at first**, but it will get easier with practice. With that said, remember to listen to your body. Challenge yourself, but don't push yourself too hard. If you experience pain or if an exercise is too difficult, you may need to stop and try a different activity or take it easier.

"After a long, tiring day at my job, I usually just want to collapse and have a good nap. But doing some work around the house, or visiting with friends, gives me my second wind and I have more energy to do the things that I like doing. It always amazes me how much staying active and enjoying my activities can help me forget about my pain and fatigue and allow me to do the things that mean the most to me."

Mike, employed full time, living with RA and an active volunteer

THE FATIGUE CYCLE

Fatigue is both a cause and an effect. When you're tired you move less—but the less you move, the more easily your body gets fatigued—which can make you inactive. Lack of activity causes muscles to become weak. Weak muscles get tired quickly and make joints work harder, which leads to joint pain—that in turn can make you inactive. When we're less physically active we tend to put on weight. This causes increased strain on your joints and increased difficulty in moving around—which can make you inactive.

It's a vicious cycle and one that can be hard to break. But we're here to help you get started.

GETTING ACTIVE



HOW MUCH? HOW TO START?

Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living says that 30 minutes of physical activity at a moderate pace most days will produce major benefits for adults of all ages.

That's not to say that you should jump from zero to full effort in one day! If your body isn't used to a lot of activity and you overdo it, you'll probably be in pain the next day, and be even less active than normal. If your activities leave you feeling overly tired, you're probably doing too much too fast. The key is to start slowly and set small goals that are achievable.

"If you are trying something new (be it exercise or something you've always wanted to explore) always remember to 'start low and go slow'. This way you can gradually build your tolerance while ensuring that you don't experience the pain, frustration, additional fatigue and/or discouragement that can occur when you overdo it."

Kelly, Occupational Therapist with extensive experience in the management of arthritis

DO I HAVE TO GO TO THE GYM?

Some people really enjoy going to the gym. Taking a class, in particular, can be a social occasion, and the fact that classes are regularly scheduled can keep you on track.

"Come rain or snow, I'm always glad that I made the effort to attend aqua-fit class. I may be tired when I enter the pool, but the exercise, fun and camaraderie of my classmates re-energizes me."

Ann, living with arthritis

But exercise is only one way of being physically active. Physical activity also includes simple daily living, such as gardening, dusting, taking out the garbage, cutting the grass, and doing other household chores.

Getting active doesn't have to be a chore, though. It can also mean playing catch in your backyard, dancing to the radio or working in your garden. If your physical activity is something that you actually enjoy, you'll be much more likely to do it regularly.

Let's look at some examples of how to increase your physical activity in your daily routine:

- If you work in an office:
 - Take frequent stretch breaks at work.
 - Stand or walk around while taking a phone call.
 - Instead of emailing, walk to your colleague's work area to ask a question.
- If you have a car:
 - Choose a parking spot further away from the entrance to the mall. Make more than one trip from the car to unload your groceries.
 - Walk to the local convenience store instead of driving.
- Choose stairs instead of the elevator on days when your knees aren't bothering you.
- Get off one stop early if you take public transit.
- If you have access to a garden, digging, pruning, raking and weeding are great ways to get active.
- Put on the radio and dance around for the length of one song.

Before starting any new exercise program or physical activities, check with your health care provider to make sure you are physically ready and the activities you have chosen are right for you.

OTHER BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Aside from decreasing fatigue, regular physical activity and exercise can:

- Decrease your pain Strengthen your muscles
- Increase your bone strength
- Help to ease your stiffness
- Improve movement in your joints
- Increase your ability to do daily activities
- **Increase your fitness level**
- Improve your sleep Improve your balance Decrease your risk of falls Keep your heart healthy
- Help you lose weight and decrease the strain on your joints
- Improve your ability to manage stress

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For easy stretches and exercises you can do anywhere, download our Top 10 Exercises cheat sheet, available in English, French, Cantonese, Tamil and Urdu.

<https://arthritis.ca/getmedia/ca83fb7d-77d0-4202-b918-b4590878c59b/FR-top-10-exercises>

The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) worked together on the development of Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines to promote healthy active living in the Canadian population. You can download the guidelines here for adults 18 to 64, and here for adults 65 and older.

<http://csepguidelines.ca/adults-18-64/>

<http://csepguidelines.ca/adults-65/>



FOOD AND ENERGY



Our Eating Well learning module examines in detail all the aspects of **nutrition that affect people with arthritis. Here we'll focus on the relationship between diet and energy.**

First of all, the word “diet” doesn’t have to mean depriving yourself of all the foods you love. We’re talking about diet in the sense of “the foods you eat.” There are adjustments you can make to the things you eat regularly that can make a big difference in the amount of energy you have.

In fact, people who go on crash or fad diets sometimes sabotage themselves by cutting out foods that provide our body with energy. How you restrict calories matters: your body needs protein for stamina and healthy fats for energy and to metabolize nutrients. If you restrict your calorie intake too much your metabolism can slow down, leading to fatigue and foggy thinking.

Does that mean weight doesn’t matter? No. The more weight your body has to carry, the harder your joints and muscles have to work, which can lead to pain and fatigue. Because of the mechanics of our body, the pressure on your knee joints when you walk is actually greater than your full body weight. This means that even a small weight loss can make a big difference.

But that doesn’t mean you necessarily have to eat less and go hungry. By **cutting back on the number of “empty calories” you eat and by increasing your intake of nutrient-rich foods**, you may actually end up eating more.



BLOOD SUGAR AND ENERGY



The kinds of food you eat play a big role in your energy levels. No doubt you've noticed that a sugary treat gives you a quick spike in energy. But you may also have noticed that you pay for it later when your energy crashes and you feel sluggish.

Foods that are high in fibre like fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes take longer for our bodies to process. They don't cause the same spike and crash in blood sugar, meaning your energy is more stable. They also keep you feeling fuller longer.

Soluble fibre in particular slows the process of glucose being absorbed into your blood. Good sources of soluble fibre include:

- oats
- legumes (beans, peas, lentils) barley
- flax or chia seeds that you can add to your food to offer a great **soluble fibre boost**
- fruit: pears, apples, blueberries, plums, strawberries, apricots, bananas, oranges, cherries, dates, peaches, prunes etc.
- vegetables: parsnips, carrots, brussels sprouts, baked potato with skin, spinach, squash, string beans, cabbage, eggplant, baked sweet potato, turnips, broccoli, kale and zucchini etc.



STAYING HYDRATED



Every cell, tissue and organ in your body needs water to function properly. You constantly lose water when you use the toilet, sweat, and even breathe. You lose water even **faster when you exercise, when it's hot outside, or if you have a fever.**

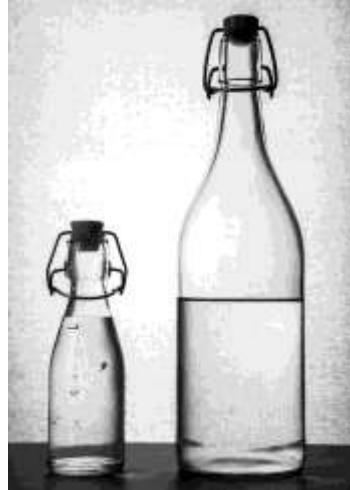
Dehydration causes your body to go into a kind of "survival mode". It tries to retain as much water as possible to protect your organs, which leads to sleepiness and fatigue. It can also cause headaches, confusion and other symptoms. When you're well hydrated your body functions better, your joints feel better and you have more energy.

Reference: American Academy of Family Physicians: <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/prevention-wellness/food-nutrition/nutrients/hydration-why-its-so-important.html>

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

You've probably heard that you need to drink 8 glasses of water every day. That's a good guide, but everyone is different. A quick way to know if you are drinking enough water is to check your urine. If it is consistently colourless or light yellow, you are probably drinking enough water. If it's dark you're probably dehydrated.

Reference: American Academy of Family Physicians:
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/prevention-wellness/food-nutrition/nutrients/hydration-why-its-so-important.html>



FATIGUE AND MOOD



Our Mental Health and Well-being learning section provides more information on the issues of mental and emotional wellness, illness and depression. Even if you think depression isn't something you're prone to, it's worth taking a look at this brief exploration—it might surprise you.

"I was raised by parents who taught me that when you have something to deal with, you just get on with it. Easier said than done when I was diagnosed with RA at 36. The uncertainty was crushing, not to mention the pain and fatigue that came along with the disease. Once independent, I struggled to maintain that independence and stay hopeful about the future. There's so much loss with the diagnosis: work, social life, relationships all take the brunt of it and they all helped to define who I was as a person. But my family doctor gave me some advice. He said I was mourning the loss of activities that I couldn't physically do anymore and I would find it easier to cope when I found new activities that I could do, so I needed to stop being so hard on myself. That was 20 years ago. My life was forever altered, but it all turned out beautifully, with a little patience and courage I became an even better version of my old self."

Cathie, business owner and active volunteer

READING THE SIGNS



Learning that you have a chronic disease such as arthritis can be shocking. Feeling blue, sad, grouchy or depressed is a symptom that is common for people living with chronic pain, lack of mobility, or other chronic challenges. These feelings can make it hard to get motivated to be active and can be one of the reasons why you feel fatigued. If you do not address your depression, it can lead to an ongoing cycle of pain and fatigue.

Sometimes we may be depressed and not even realize it. Here are some of the common symptoms — an individual might have all or only a few of them. If you think you might be experiencing depression, speak to your healthcare provider, who can help you take care of your emotional well-being.

Loss of interest in friends or participating in usually enjoyable activities

- An unusual decrease or increase in appetite
- Loss of interest in personal care or appearance
- Feeling confused
- Inability to concentrate
- Frequent accidents
- Isolation or withdrawal
- **Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much**
- Unintentional weight loss or gain
- General feeling of unhappiness or numbness
- Frequent crying
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loss of interest in sex or intimacy
- Low self-image, loss of self-esteem
- Frequent arguments or loss of temper
- Feeling tired or fatigued

There are some online tools that have been created to help people assess their symptoms, but as the Canadian Mental Health Association's website points out, "**These [tools] are just guides. No test is 100% accurate. Whatever these tools reveal, anyone with concerns should speak to a health professional.**" If you are interested in taking an online test of your symptoms, you may want to try Here to Help's Online Screening tool that takes only a few minutes.

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/screening/online/?screen=depression>

Take it and see how you score. You can make note of your results to discuss with your healthcare provider if you are concerned.

DEALING WITH FEELING DOWN



Sometimes depression is severe and you may need professional help and medication. If your feelings of unhappiness are ongoing or if you think about harming yourself, it is VERY important to talk to your doctor. There are many ways in which severe, clinical depression can be treated. However, if what you are experiencing is more like a temporary feeling of the blues, here are some things to try:

- Do something nice for yourself. Treat yourself to something special.
- Get some exercise. Go for a walk or stretch your muscles and joints.
- Connect with other people. Call or plan an activity with a friend or family member.
- Plan ahead for a special event.
- Do something nice for someone else. Become a volunteer or help an elderly neighbour.

If you're having difficulty coping with the pain or stress of arthritis, it might be helpful to connect with other people who have arthritis and have gone through similar experiences. You may find an online chat group, a community support group, or a social media page where you can share your experiences. Sometimes just knowing that there are other people who understand what you are going through can make things seem a little easier.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Self-talk is about those habitual things we say or think to ourselves. We all do it, whether we realize it or not. Negative self-talk can make our life seem like an uphill battle and can perpetuate the pain and fatigue cycle. Learning to change one's self-talk from negative to positive is an important tool. No one is suggesting that you can simply think your problems away, but finding a slightly more positive spin on the stories we tell ourselves can make a huge difference in what seems possible.

EXAMPLES

On waking up before going to work:

Negative: "Getting up is so hard. All I want to do is stay in bed. Everything I have to do today seems so overwhelming."

Positive: "Getting up is hard, but I know that once I get going it will get easier. I have a lot to do today, but I just have to take it one step at a time and do my best. I'll find a way, and if it's too much I can figure out how to get help or postpone some of it."



On exercise

Negative: "I know I'm supposed to exercise, but I just can't. Just thinking about it makes me tired. I can't play tennis or go running like I used to. And I know that I'd end up in pain no matter what I tried."



Positive: "If I start small and see how it goes it will be better than doing nothing. I could drive to the Garden Club's centre and take a walk around the garden. If I get too tired, I could sit down and enjoy the flowers while I rest."

"Be aware that depression happens and can be addressed. We are all susceptible to mental illness as we are to physical illnesses.

There is no one specific cause of depression. It can be triggered by traumatic events, a biochemical imbalance or through experiencing particularly negative experiences. A family history of the illness can also position you to being more prone to depression than others. There is also a direct link between chronic pain and depression. Willingness to acknowledge, self-awareness and education, early intervention, acceptance and treatment are the primary steps in the road to recovery. "

Dave Gallson, Associate National Executive Director, Mood Disorders Society of Canada

FATIGUE AND PAIN



Chronic or persistent pain is a problem shared by most people with arthritis. While it may feel like there is nothing you can do, there are strategies you can use to reduce your pain and help you manage.

Our Managing Chronic Pain learning module goes into greater detail on pain, its causes and ways to cope with it. This section will give you a brief overview.

Pain — is it all in your head?

Well, technically the answer is yes. Pain starts in different parts of your body, but is experienced by your brain. Pain signals are sent from nerve endings in your joints, muscles and other tissues up through the spinal cord to the brain. The brain is the organ that actually perceives pain.



This means that you can use your mind to help you manage your pain.

Your pain is real and you can't simply think it away. But recent research shows that it is possible to change how our brain responds to and perceives pain.

THE PAIN CYCLE

The first step in managing pain is to understand the pain cycle.



Pain can be related to at least five things:

- Physical problems caused by injury, illness or surgery (disease pain)
- Tense muscles (which may be the body's reaction to protect injured joints)
- Psychological stress such as fear, anger and frustration
- Depression or other negative emotions/feelings
- Fatigue caused by the disease or by inactivity

The good thing about understanding the pain cycle is that it helps you to see that there are many ways to break it.



PAIN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES



PAIN MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Our "Managing Chronic Pain" learning section goes into more depth **about the science of pain and recommends specific techniques to consider**. Here are a few ideas.

1. Distraction

Our minds have difficulty concentrating on two things at once. Have you ever hit your funny bone and rubbed it hard? We do this instinctively because the sensation caused by rubbing disrupts the pain signal by distracting our brain. Some nurses will pinch you or wiggle your skin when giving an injection — again, by giving us two things to focus on we reduce the attention given to the pain.



Our instinct when we are in pain is to stop everything. Sometimes this is necessary, but often it **is counterproductive**. **You've probably noticed that when you are doing something you really enjoy** — reading a great book or spending time with friends — or when you really have to concentrate — doing a logic puzzle or putting together a bookshelf following complex instructions — you tend to notice your pain a little less. The pain is still there, but your brain is less focused on it.

Experiment with the kinds of things that help distract you. Make a **list. It won't cure your pain**, but it may make it easier to cope with.

2. Muscle Relaxation

Pain can cause our muscles to tense, and tense muscles can lead to more pain. Try a guided relaxation program. As muscles become less tense, it is easier and less painful to move the joints. In addition to releasing tension throughout the body, relaxation helps you to sleep. Here are a few of our favourite guided relaxation programs to try.



3. Reduce Stress

Reducing stress is another way to manage your pain. There are several ways to reduce stress, including deep breathing exercises or, listening to a guided imagery program. Like all exercises, you need to practice to obtain the best results. Click the triangle above to play the "Sunrise at the Ocean" guided imagery audio program to give it a try.



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4. Do Things Differently

Knowing simple body mechanics can help. Larger joints can take more load than smaller joints. Try pushing open a door with your hip and shoulder instead of your hand. Instead of carrying a handbag on your wrist, carry a bag or purse across your shoulder or use a backpack.

Source: "Think Ahead: How to manage pain and fatigue"

5. Educate Yourself and Reach Out

Learning to manage pain isn't easy. But learning as much as you can about your particular type of pain and actively working with your pain management team are two very effective ways of regaining control over your life.



There are a number of individuals and organizations that can help, including medical specialists, a pharmacist, community organizations, friends and family, and the Arthritis Society.

Take advantage of the help, advice, expertise and experience of the members of your treatment team: ask questions and learn to use every resource available to you.

A word of caution

While distracting yourself from pain can help, don't ignore it. Pain is a signal from your body to the brain that helps protect a diseased joint or sore muscle or tendon. Pain may be caused by something that we either do – like too much activity – or something we don't do – like not getting any exercise. The disease process itself also causes pain. If you experience new or severe pain, let your doctor know!

"As a person with arthritis and a history of back pain including whiplash, I have learned that fatigue is a very important contributor to the chronic pain experience. Managing fatigue goes a long way to changing one's pain experience. I found that there was not a single pathway to manage my fatigue – rather I needed to take multiple paths. [To get more sleep at night,] I needed to improve my sleep hygiene and create an environment dedicated to sleeping, I needed to lose weight, I used a CPAP machine to reduce sleep apnea, my sleep apnea improved when I lost weight, I needed to ensure I had adequate exercise to feel more physically tired [at bedtime] and improve my cardiovascular health (aquatic activities helped me take the first step). I also found that I enjoyed a hot bath! Taking an action-oriented approach to managing fatigue changed my pain experience and led to improvements in my overall health. There are many different avenues to managing fatigue and pain that are supported by current research."

Marc White, Executive Director, Canadian Institute for the Relief of Pain and Disability

STAY IN TOUCH



Thank you for taking a few minutes to [complete our survey at surveymonkey.com/courseseval](https://surveymonkey.com/courseseval). Your feedback will guide the ongoing improvement of our programs to help you and other Canadians better manage your arthritis.

Sign up to the flourish e-newsletter to receive health and wellness advice, self-management tips, inspirational stories and much more to help you move through life with arthritis.

