

Fatigue

After concussion / mild traumatic brain injury



Health
Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a common symptom after a concussion/mild traumatic brain injury. Fatigue is when you feel very tired even though you have not exerted yourself physically or mentally. It is common to feel fatigued in the first few days after a mild brain injury. A small number of people will report experiencing fatigue for up to 3 months or longer after a concussion/mild traumatic brain injury.

How can fatigue affect you?

Fatigue can impact on you in many ways, including managing everyday responsibilities, returning to work and/or spending time with family and friends. Experiencing fatigue may lead to difficulties with motivation. This in turn may lead to mood and emotional changes such as anxiety and depression.

If fatigue is an ongoing problem speak with your local doctor. Together you can work out what might be causing your fatigue and how to better manage it.



Factors causing fatigue

Fatigue may be caused by other factors after sustaining a concussion/ mild traumatic brain injury such as:

- Thinking, paying attention, concentrating or doing two things at once may wear you out quickly
- Group conversations or long social interaction
- Vision issues: some people experience issues with their eyes not working together properly when reading or using a computer. This can lead to fatigue. An eye review may be recommended with an Optometrist.
- Pain: neck pain due to whiplash is common and can lead to headaches. Both kinds of pain can cause fatigue and it is important to work out the source of the pain to treat it effectively
- Poor sleep: following a concussion/ mild brain injury some people have difficulty getting enough good quality sleep at night. They sometimes wake up feeling tired or need naps during the day. Establishing a good sleep routine may help to reduce the impact on fatigue.

Tips for planning your day to manage fatigue

- Take regular breaks before you get tired
- Avoid relying on stimulants, for example caffeine or energy drinks
- Find your 'sweet spot' to balance your energy levels. This is a balance between doing too little and too much
- Work smarter, not harder
- Return to challenging tasks gradually, such as returning to work
- Reduce distractions.

Circle of Support

Enlist the support of family, friends and work colleagues – let them know that you are experiencing fatigue as a symptom.

They can look out for signs of fatigue like drowsiness, irritability, losing concentration, and then support you to have a rest when needed.



Strategies to reduce fatigue

Here are some strategies to reduce the impact of fatigue:

- Sleep – try to ensure you get a good night's sleep by establishing a good sleep routine. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day is one of the best strategies
- Nutrition – consider some simple dietary changes to include healthy anti-inflammatory foods (such as salmon, fruit, vegetables and healthy fats) and reducing less healthy pro-inflammatory foods (such as white pasta, bread, refined sugar and red meat)
- Exercise – gradually increase your exercise levels and monitor your symptoms. If the symptoms worsen, reduce your activity levels for a day or two and then slowly increase again. You may like to seek the advice of a physiotherapist with experience managing concussion
- Activity levels – pace yourself over the course of your day. Most people report having greater levels of energy in the morning and lower levels in the afternoon. Complete more challenging activities when you have more energy and build in rest breaks
- Medication – may be required to treat anxiety and depression
- Reduce stress levels – consider meditation exercises and thinking differently about your situation, as well as other stress management strategies.

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