

## FATIGUE

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### **Since my stroke I feel tired. Am I normal?**

Fatigue is common in patients with [stroke](#). Approximately 50% of [stroke](#) survivors will experience fatigue after having a [stroke](#), no matter what the severity of the [stroke](#) is.

### **What is fatigue after stroke?**

Fatigue is a feeling of early tiredness, lack of energy and aversion to effort. Fatigue occurs during or after activity that is physically demanding, mentally demanding (i.e. requiring attention and concentration) or emotionally demanding (e.g. conflict with another person). The main difference with regular fatigue is that post-[stroke](#) fatigue usually does not get better as fast with rest.

### **Are there different types of fatigue?**

Fatigue after [stroke](#) is usually distinguished into three types: 1) physical, 2) mental or cognitive, and 3) emotional.

*Physical fatigue* is when a person is unusually tired after physical activity, or is unable to perform a physical activity that requires more effort or strength (e.g. walking, going up the stairs) or for a long period of time.

*Mental or cognitive fatigue* is when a person is unusually tired after or unable to perform an activity that requires attention, concentration or multitasking (e.g. reading, following a movie).

*Emotional fatigue* is when a person is unusually tired after difficult interactions or conflicts with close ones (e.g. marital conflict, being uncomfortable with someone, difficulty managing emotions).

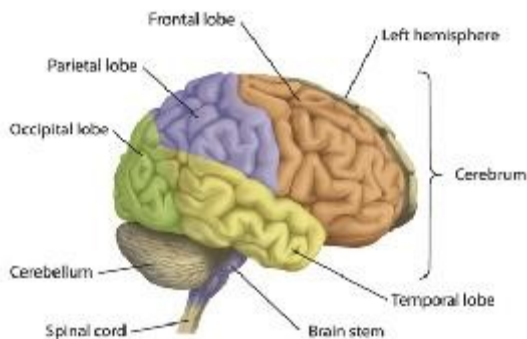
### **When would fatigue appear after a stroke?**

Fatigue after [stroke](#) can appear at different times. Some people experience fatigue shortly after the [stroke](#). Others experience fatigue much later after [stroke](#), even 1 year after [stroke](#).

### Is fatigue caused by my stroke?

It is possible that the fatigue you are experiencing is an effect of your [stroke](#). Here is one possible explanation:

#### Injury to your brain



There are debates on whether the site of the lesion ([stroke](#) location) is related to symptoms of fatigue. Some research shows that people who have a [stroke](#) in specific parts of the brain (basal ganglia, internal capsule, brainstem, thalamus) are more likely to experience post-[stroke](#) fatigue. Other research argues that it is the number of strokes that matter, where fatigue is more common in people who have

had several strokes rather than in those who had a [stroke](#) for the first time.

### How do I know if I have post-stroke fatigue? What are the common signs of fatigue after a stroke?

People who have fatigue after [stroke](#) share some common traits such as:

- Low energy
- Feeling weary soon after starting a physical activity (e.g. walking, exercise), an activity that is mentally demanding (e.g. reading, social event) or an activity that is emotionally demanding (e.g. conflict with another person).
- Feeling a loss of self-control
- Feeling emotional instability
- Feeling of tiredness that becomes greater during physical exercise, during [activities](#) that require concentration and/or with stress.

### Is it easy to detect fatigue after a stroke?

It is often easy to detect fatigue in a person that has had a [stroke](#). However, it can be difficult to identify the type of fatigue you are experiencing and what causes you to feel tired. Your rehabilitation therapist may often ask about your level of fatigue. However, sometimes people who had a [stroke](#) have problems speaking or

understanding words; this makes it more difficult to share information about fatigue symptoms.

### How is the diagnosis of fatigue after a stroke made?

Your therapist may ask you a series of questions or have you or your caregiver fill out a questionnaire. This will help to identify presence of fatigue.

### Are there different kinds of therapies for fatigue?

There are many different therapies available for fatigue after [stroke](#). This module includes the following interventions:

- **Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR):** a program that helps you to calm you mind and body to help cope with illness, pain, and stress.
- **Inspiratory muscle training (IMT):** breathing exercises using a breathing device.
- **Game-based team therapy:** playing games in groups that are competitive in nature (e.g. playing ball with scores).
- **Multimodal interventions:** rehabilitation that combines physical exercises and cognitive exercises together.
- **Psychoeducation:** education, advice, recommendations, and strategies to help change your thoughts and behavior.

There is no known ‘cure’ for post-[stroke](#) fatigue. However, when we asked individuals who have had a [stroke](#) for their key strategies to cope with fatigue post-[stroke](#), they told us:

- To accept that you may need to reduce the frequency or intensity of an activity;
- To plan rest periods into your daily routine;
- To organise your environment and routine;
- To conserve your energy when doing everyday [activities](#) by making a task simpler;
- To identify the type of fatigue you are prone to and the [activities](#) that trigger your fatigue;
- To prioritise [activities](#) that are meaningful to you and your well-being;
- To communicate with your close-ones about your level of fatigue;
- To engage in planned exercise such as aerobics to increase endurance;

- To practice good sleep patterns.

### **What fatigue therapies work for stroke?**

Fatigue therapies have been examined using [high](#) and [fair](#) quality research studies. Some therapies were shown to improve mental fatigue and other important domains such as independence in self-care [activities](#), [depression](#), sleep, endurance and respiratory function in some patients after [stroke](#).

In particular, for patients with chronic [stroke](#) (more than 6 months after [stroke](#)), mindfulness-based stress reduction therapy has been shown to be useful to improve mental fatigue, [depression](#), anxiety, and cognitive abilities (e.g. attention).

For patients with [stroke](#) across the recovery continuum (acute, subacute and/or chronic), inspiratory muscle training, game-based team therapy, and multimodal interventions have been shown to be useful to improve fatigue, independence in everyday [activities](#) (e.g. dressing, walking), respiratory function (e.g. inspiration and expiration lung capacities), [depression](#), and sleep.

### **What can I expect in terms of therapy for fatigue?**

Your therapist will discuss with you what fatigue therapy is most suitable for you. How often and for how long the therapy is provided for depends on the nature of therapy.

### **Who provides the treatment?**

Different health-care providers can administer fatigue therapies: occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, neuropsychologists and nurses.

### **Are there any side effects or risks?**

Fatigue therapies are usually administered by a trained health professional at a rehabilitation clinic or at home. Your therapist will monitor your reactions to the therapy closely. It is important to report to your therapist any changes in your state (e.g. more or less fatigue, sleep quality, independence for daily tasks). Your therapist will adjust the nature, intensity and the duration of therapy according to your ability, endurance and progress.

### **Is it possible to speak to someone who had a stroke?**

Support groups are available in some regions for people who have had a [stroke](#). You can also find stories about people who have had problems similar to yours. Consult your National [Stroke](#) Association.

### **How does my fatigue impact on my recovery?**

Fatigue after [stroke](#) may make you feel less motivated, more tired, and also may cause you to have trouble concentrating. All these symptoms of fatigue will slow down your recovery. Studies have shown that people who have fatigue after [stroke](#) do not get better as quickly as people who do not have fatigue.

### **I would like to know more about fatigue and stroke?**

Understanding how fatigue and [stroke](#) happen can reassure you. There are many resources online. Your health care provider can help answer your specific questions.

A documentary (lasting 40 minutes) presenting how fatigue impacts daily life of five individuals and what strategies they use to effectively cope with fatigue was produced in March 2019. The documentary (in French) can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

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