Fatigue

Physiology

The decreased capacity or complete inability of an individual to function normally because of excessive stimulation or prolonged exertion mentally and/or physically.

Signs and symptoms

Biological causes of fatigue may include infectious diseases (colds, mono, flu), malignancies, diffuse vascular diseases, metabolic or endocrine diseases, certain medications, or pregnancy.

Psychological causes of fatigue may include depression, boredom, frustration, loneliness and acute or chronic stress due to social, financial, academic, and/or family pressures.

The symptoms produced by biological causes may include:

- Fever
- Pallor (paleness)
- Cyanosis (bluish discoloration) around the lips and fingernail beds, and sometimes around the earlobes
- Weakness or exhaustion after minimum effort
- Fatigue inappropriate for activity
- A fall in blood pressure due to change in position
- Enlarged liver, spleen, or lymph glands

Symptoms of psychological causes may include:

- Fatigue when arising in the morning
- “Down in dumps” feeling
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Awakening early in the morning with difficulty falling asleep again
- Decreased appetite and/or weight loss
- Headaches
- Constipation
- Tendency to cry easily
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Failure to achieve personal goals
- Poor living habits (insufficient exercise, insufficient diet, insufficient rest, or an overloaded schedule) can also cause fatigue.

Practices for good sleep

- Exercise—but not within 3 hours preceding bedtime.
- Avoid heavy meals within 3 hours preceding bedtime.
- Do not consume caffeine within 8 hours of bedtime.
- If you must nap, limit it to less than 1 hour in the early afternoon.
- Maintain a regular bedtime/wakeup schedule, even on weekends.
- Reserve the bedroom for sleep; don’t work, read, eat, or watch TV in bed.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and a comfortable temperature.
- Maintain a consistent, relaxing bedtime ritual: soak in a warm tub, read, or listen to soothing music, etc.
- Avoid watching the clock; turn it so you can’t see it, and then don’t think about the passage of time.
- Recognize the relationship of stress to fatigue.

**Treatment**

Various treatments may be recommended by a clinician and/or a counselor.