

Many people with spinal cord injury (SCI) experience fatigue. There are different types of fatigue – from muscle fatigue to whole body tiredness. Fatigue can be from many different causes such as strain from lifting your body weight with your arms, reduced strength or control in your postural muscles so that movement uses more energy, or from muscles not regaining full strength after the injury so activity is more effortful. Fatigue can affect people with both complete and incomplete injuries, and as you know, no spinal cord injury is the same.

Fatigue after a neurological injury such as SCI is common and is not about laziness or a lack of motivation or “can’t be bothered-itis”! It is a real and very frustrating part of living with a SCI, and can be made worse by also having chronic pain. **The good news is that many of the key strategies you can use to manage your chronic pain are also highly effective in managing fatigue.** These strategies include developing an activity pacing plan, an activity upgrade plan, and a pain / fatigue flare up plan. It takes time to decide what strategies work for you, and patience and persistence to make these strategies work best. Take time to develop and refine pacing and flare up plans so you can manage pain and fatigue after SCI.

Things to consider in understanding and managing fatigue:

🌀 The ENERGY BANK:

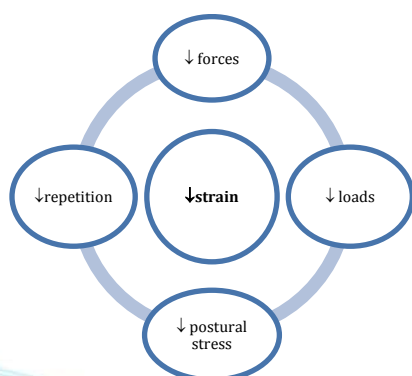
- You have a certain amount of energy in the energy bank - budget wisely and think carefully about how to “spend” your energy currency!
- Plan your day and your activities to conserve energy & pace yourself through the day

🌀 TRIGGERS:

- Understand what triggers your fatigue increases your awareness & control over it
- Possible triggers of fatigue include overdoing an activity, poor diet, poor sleep
- Avoid the “boom and bust cycle” – rather than letting pain or fatigue levels dictate what you do, try to stick to the amount you know you can do, refer to pacing plan

🌀 REDUCE STRAIN:

- Include strategies to vary & minimise physical stress and strain on your body
- Consider the following ideas:



- 🌀 **Reduce force** eg: *reduce forces at your wrist by choosing ergonomic push rims*
- 🌀 **Reduce load** eg: *reduce load on your shoulder by not loading the arm above shoulder height*
- 🌀 **Reduce repetition** eg: *reduce the total number of transfers daily to keep arms and shoulders healthy*
- 🌀 **Reduce postural stress** eg: *change position frequently and alternate tasks that require different positions and postures to minimise strain*

A QUESTION OF BALANCE:

- Balance rest and activity – all rest and no activity will ultimately make fatigue worse and reduces your overall fitness and muscular endurance
- Remember that you need to keep rest break times limited and work to achieve your activity quota during the day
- Try to balance work and play – it is important to do at least one pleasant thing each day – this is very important for your overall energy and sense of well-being!

COMMUNICATION:

- Be confident when communicating with others about your pain and fatigue – friends, family and work colleagues are often more understanding than you think they will be.
- Learn to identify your own boundaries and your own needs and communicate these to others in your life – assertively and confidently, not apologetically or aggressively.
- Learning to communicate in this way can be a very delicate balance and can take some practice – it might take a few goes to get it right – and that is ok.

THE RIGHT FUEL:

- Take a long hard look at your diet – is what you eat truly **nourishing** your body?
- Your diet and fluid intake impacts on pain and fatigue
- Eat a nutritious balanced diet for best results

CONSIDER “ACTIVE” REST:

- Relaxation and meditation activate descending pathways from the brain to reduce pain – think of these strategies as a form of “Active Rest”
- Active rest has more of an impact on reducing your pain than just “laying down” to rest
- Schedule practice of relaxation and meditation into your daily plan for best results

PLANNING TIPS:

- Taking time to plan will mean that you have more energy during the activity and it can also help to reduce anxiety about the outing as you will feel well prepared and in control
- Plan a rest break or quiet activity prior to and after a stressful or physically taxing task
- Plan visits and research details about locations, parking stations, public transport access, building access and accessibility/facilities on the location web site prior to a visit
- Planning tools and applications such as google maps and street view to estimate distances and terrain in the local area



REMEMBER! Dealing with chronic pain and fatigue can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness – try to speak with a trusted family member or friend, speak to your health professional or seek out online discussion forums. Listen to other people’s stories and learn from their experiences, try strategies on for size and remember to be flexible and creative in your approach, adapting ideas to suit you and your situation best.