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5 Telltale Signs of Fatigue

It's something more than just needing extra shuteye. How to tell if you've got fatigue

By Jill Provost - November 15, 2012



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Your venti latte won't perk you up. A walk in the park feels like a death march. The only thing you can fathom doing after work is plopping down in front of the TV. In a culture that's on 24/7, it's easy to get worn out. But fatigue that continues even after a few days of rest is not normal, explains Loretta Williams, Ph.D., R.N., assistant professor in the department of symptom research at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. "Unexplained fatigue is not a symptom that should

be ignored. People shouldn't be hypochondriacs about fatigue, but it's a sign that your body needs something it's not getting," she says.

Unfortunately, we're so focused on our to-do lists, we may not stop to listen to what our body is trying to tell us, says Eva Cwynar, M.D., hormone and metabolism specialist and author of the book, *Fatigue Solution*. Sure, you're out of gas, but when you've been running on empty for so long, why would you think it's abnormal?

So, how can you tell if you're fatigued or just overwhelmed and overworked? Here, the top signs that you're in need of an energy overhaul.

You're So Tired

Your daydreams revolve around your bed -- and not in a sexy kind of way. "Some people, when they're fatigued, say they are drowsy during the day, or they'll nod off unexpectedly. Others won't be sleepy, but get so tired that they have to rest," says Williams. "[Fatigue] is different from being sleepy. They can be go hand-in-hand, but they're not the same thing."



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Your Body Feels Heavy

Your reactors are in meltdown mode and even your backup generator -- i.e. caffeine -- is not giving you the juice you need. "You keep reaching for that extra cup of coffee, hoping it will get you started," says Cwynar. When you're in this fatigued state, the first thing that you'll notice is you can't push yourself to just power through it anymore, says Williams. "Things like walking, working, and other kinds of general physical activities start to be restricted." According to Williams, some people experience this physical exhaustion as weakness or heaviness in their arms and legs. "They feel like they're moving more slowly, like they're moving through molasses." And if you can actually motivate yourself enough to work out, says Cwynar, you may notice that you're not able to maintain the level that you're used to.

You Think You Might Be Depressed

According to Williams and Cwynar, depression and fatigue can look a lot alike. "You're just not right. You don't have the get-up-and-go in the morning. You find nothing in life interesting. You don't have the energy to do anything," details Cwynar. To Williams, the key in distinguishing the two comes down to desire. Are you frustrated that your exhaustion is getting in the way of the things you're used to doing, or are you ambivalent about doing those things in the first place? If you just don't feel like doing the activities you typically like, you're probably depressed, she says. However, she points out that if not treated, fatigue can lead to depression.

You're Acting Antisocial

Feel like a shut-in lately? As fatigue gets worse, it can start to affect your mood and your social calendar. "Some people get so tired that they can't interact with people," says Williams. This may translate to [opting out of social events](#), because you don't have the energy to leave the house, let alone carry on a conversation. If you are out, sometimes, says Williams, you can hit a wall without warning. "I've had patients tell me they had to go into a room by themselves, or tell their husbands, 'We need to leave now.'"

You Can't Concentrate

Books are gathering dust on your nightstand, but you know every show that's on TV.

Thinking is the final thing to be impacted, says

Williams. Not only are your physical reserves low, but you feel [mentally wiped out](#), too.

"When you sit down to rest, you have to do some mindless activity, because even reading requires too much energy."

Your Next Step

According to Cwynar, the signs of fatigue aren't always universal. "Not everyone exhibits fatigue in exactly the same way," she says. If you're in a constant state of exhaustion that has nothing to do with lack of sleep, it's time to see your doctor. "It's important to identify it, because there's always a cause and there's [always a solution](#)."

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