

# Fatigue after stroke

## What you need to know

- › **Fatigue is weariness that isn't related to how active you've been and doesn't get better with rest.**
- › **Fatigue is very common after stroke no matter how mild or severe your stroke was.**
- › **There are things you should check with your doctor and ways to manage fatigue.**

## About fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, tiredness or lack of energy. Fatigue can be brought on by activity, however it can happen even if you are not particularly active. Fatigue after stroke is not improved by rest.

Fatigue is very common after stroke, with about half of survivors experiencing it. Fatigue can affect anyone, no matter how mild or severe their stroke. It is most likely to start in the first weeks after a stroke but for some people it can start months later.

For most people fatigue does improve with time, however it is difficult to predict. Keep in mind fatigue can last longer than you expect, especially if you are planning to return to work.

## Causes of fatigue


The cause of fatigue after stroke is unclear. After a stroke, physical and mental activities may require more effort, contributing to fatigue. Pain, poor sleep and breathing problems during sleep can also contribute to fatigue. While fatigue is different to depression, the symptoms of depression can include feeling tired. Some medicines taken after stroke can contribute to fatigue. Nutritional deficiencies can also contribute to fatigue.

## Managing fatigue

It's important to investigate and manage anything that may be contributing to your fatigue. Speak to your doctor about pain, sleep problems and your mood. Also ask about medications and nutritional deficiencies that may be contributing to fatigue.

## Balancing activity and rest

Listening to your body and respecting its limits is important. Understanding what makes it worse and when it is most likely to happen will help.



Do everyday tasks in a way that uses less energy, for example sitting down to get dressed. Plan activities for when you have the most energy. Break activities into smaller tasks and rest in between. Try spreading activities throughout the day or week and plan rest breaks. You may choose to prioritise the activities and events that are most important to you.

If you are planning to return to work, consider starting back part-time and increasing your hours gradually.

It may be that pushing through fatigue to complete physical or mental activities can help recovery, however more research is needed. Understanding your body and how fatigue affects you will help you make decisions about how much to push. Pushing gently will most likely be best, as pushing too much can worsen fatigue.

### Exercise, diet and sleep

Research suggests exercise may help lessen fatigue. Even if you feel tired, do some exercise each day. Even small amounts can help.

Eat a healthy diet and drink enough water. Try avoiding alcohol which is a sedative.

Good sleep habits may help. Get up at the same time every day and get some early morning sunshine. Exposure to light when you first wake up helps to set your body clock. If you need a nap, have it earlier in the afternoon and try to keep it to 20 minutes. In the evening, do not ignore tiredness. Go to bed when your body tells you. Make sure to wind down or relax at least an hour before bed.

### Talk to family and friends

Fatigue after stroke is not well understood in the community, and the signs of fatigue are not always obvious to other people. Family and friends may not understand why you can not do things or attend events. It can help if you educate the people around you about fatigue. If someone offers you help, consider taking it rather than feeling like you have to do everything yourself.

## More help

The health professionals at **StrokeLine** provide information, advice, support and referral. StrokeLine's practical and confidential advice will help you manage your health better and live well. Call **1800 STROKE** (1800 787 653) Email [strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)

Join Australia's online stroke community with videos, fact sheets, resources and support for stroke survivors, their family and friends. [enableme.org.au](http://enableme.org.au)

Find an occupational therapist:  
Occupational Therapy Australia  
1300 682 878 [www.otaus.com.au](http://www.otaus.com.au)



The Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting stroke survivors.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

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