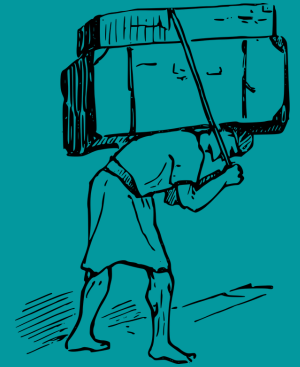


FATIGUE

A guide to managing fatigue and regaining balance

"Fatigue feels like a heavy weight I am carrying around. Everything is more difficult so I tend to either push myself hard or give up completely".



Fatigue is real. It is common following a virus. It impacts on many areas of your life and there are ways to manage it.

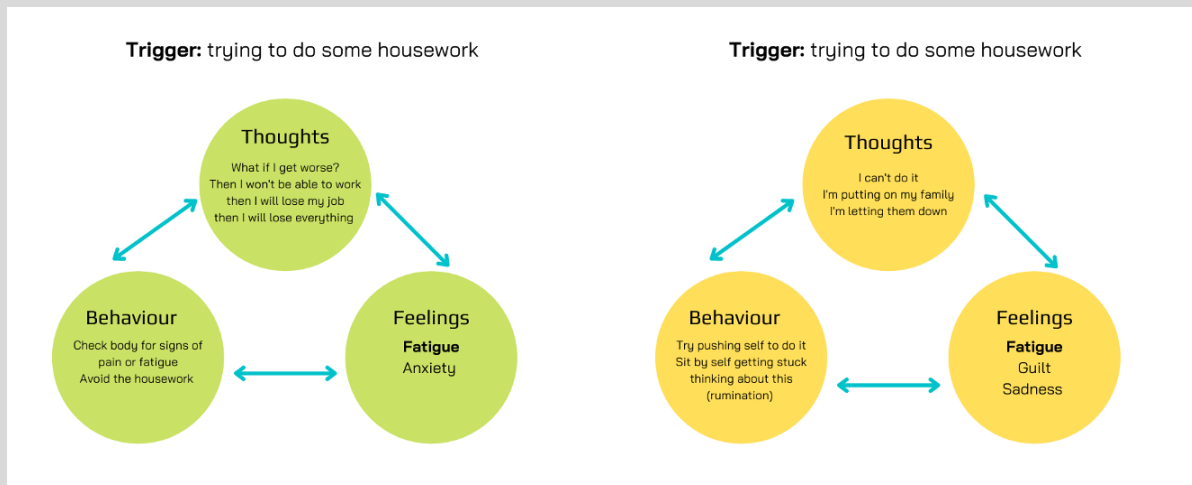


Fatigue is often considered a physical symptom of an illness, but it impacts on **all** areas of a person's life. It is a bio- psychosocial phenomenon. In other words, having fatigue affects your physical functioning, which in turn can impact on your ability to work, engage fully in meaningful relationships and pleasurable activities, and can make you view yourself in a negative way. This can lead to low mood and anxiety.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF FATIGUE

Post-covid fatigue is very common. How you manage this will depend on your reaction to it. By understanding the relationship between your thoughts, feelings and behaviours you will be able to break the cycle in helpful ways. This will include acceptance of the fatigue in the present moment, rather than comparing yourself to how you were before the virus.

These two vicious cycles show how the same trigger can cause different reactions in terms of emotional response to fatigue.



COMMON EFFECTS OF FATIGUE

ACTIVITY

Fatigue affects our physical functioning in many ways. It can make us more cautious about moving and doing tasks for fear of negative consequences – for example “what if I feel worse after preparing this meal?” This leads to avoidance in the hope that energy will be conserved. When feeling better you are likely to over-exert yourself causing the boom-and-bust effect.

SLEEP

Altered activity and rest patterns impacts sleep routine. You may be extremely tired but cannot sleep or experience a day-night reversal due to napping in the day. Poor sleep will make the fatigue worse therefore forming a vicious cycle. Tips for sleep hygiene can be found on the **sleep** page of this resource.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Fatigue causes physical exhaustion. This may manifest in pain including headaches, muscular tension in any part of the body, joint pain and muscle weakness. Post-covid fatigue may be affected by additional physical symptoms such as breathlessness and chest pain. Pain makes most people stop moving which can make the fatigue worse.

MENTAL FATIGUE

Mental fatigue is also known as ‘brain fog’. Concentration is severely impaired which makes routine tasks like filling in forms or writing emails more demanding. Despite feeling exhausted mental fatigue impacts on normal sleep routine. Worry and rumination (getting stuck on the same thoughts, normally negative ones) exacerbates mental fatigue. This often leads to low mood and depression.



Self monitoring

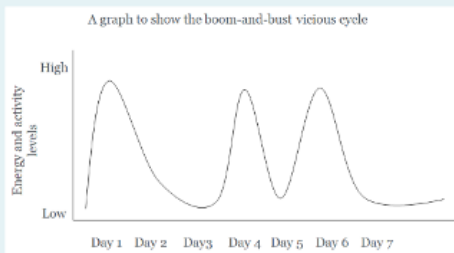
Before any intervention do a **baseline** to assess your current activity levels and impact of fatigue on functioning. You can use an activity diary for this:

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/images/how-we-can-help/living-with-a-terminal-illness/symptoms-and-how-to-manage-them/breathlessness/fatigue-diary-and-planner.pdf>

MANAGING FATIGUE THROUGH PACING

Pacing involves spreading out activity and alternating it with rest periods, so you can continue for longer. It is a drug-free energy conscious approach to help you maximize your energy and tackle daily activities.

BOOM AND BUST VICIOUS CYCLE



Day 1: Having a 'good' day, completing a lot of activities. (Boom)

Day 2/3: Due to overdoing yourself on the 'good' day you suffer with increased fatigue the following day and need to rest. (Bust)

Day 4: After the rest days, you feel better so go back to doing a lot of activities (Boom)

Day 5: Again you suffer with another increased period of fatigue and need to rest for another day (Bust)

Day 6: Due to the rest day you have another 'good' day (Boom)

Day 7: This leads to another increased fatigue symptoms (Bust)

What is boom and bust?

Energy levels naturally vary. On a 'good' day, you may be able to complete a lot of your daily tasks and activities, because you are feeling more energetic than usual (Boom).

However, this may lead to you overdoing things, resulting in a number of 'bad' days where you are unable to complete the tasks you have planned (Bust). This is known as boom and bust.

Pacing will help you set a baseline, integrate rest periods and slowly increase your activity levels.

Plan

Planning in advance allows you to breakdown activities into small steps. This will help you when integrating pacing into your activities. Planning your week will help you integrate pacing into your daily routine.

Prioritise

After you have planned your week, it can be overwhelming to look at what you have planned. It may be helpful to break up what activities are **necessary** or **beneficial** to you. You can do this by prioritizing your tasks in order of importance.

Pace

Tips for pacing:

- take regular rest periods
- spread activities or one activity throughout the day
- try different ways to break down each task
- stick to your plan (baselines)
- do what you planned and not what you feel like

PACING UP

It may take you a couple of weeks to establish a basic routine. Pacing can be difficult because it requires a lot of planning.

Remember pacing requires a lot of self-discipline, as it can be tempting to do more when you're feeling 'good', but make sure you stick to your plan.

Once you have established a good routine you can begin increasing your activity levels, by building on your baseline activity rate.

Give yourself time to adapt to the new level of activity, increasing should be a slow and steady process.

BALANCING ACTIVITY & REST

Rest takes different forms. Remember we are trying to break the boom and bust so try not to rest too much as this can demotivate you.

Physical rest	Resting to relieve the body of physical stresses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive: sleeping, napping, sitting or laying down • Active: activities such as yoga, meditation , watching TV, stretching or massage therapy.
Mental rest	Resting to calm your mind and refocus on things that are important to you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping a notepad around to write down your thoughts • Focusing on your breathing
Sensory rest	Resting to lower the sensory input from the world around you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing your eyes • Turning off your electronics in the evening
Creative rest	Resting to allow you to sit back and appreciate nature, natural beauty, art to inspire and motivate you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colouring, painting, crafts • Cooking, gardening, decorating
Emotional rest	Resting so you are able to express genuine feelings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noting down your feelings on paper • Reaching out to a friend, family member or a stranger to talk
Social rest	Resting to reflect on relationships that are positive to you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have to turn down plans, to give yourself time to rest • It is important to recognize when you need to slow down and take a step back
Spiritual rest	Resting to connect or engage in your beliefs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This can give you a sense of belonging, purpose & acceptance • To engage in prayer, meditation, religious practices

*Listen to your body, pace yourself & rest.
Don't suffer in silence. Ask for help when needed.*