By: Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

Everyone feels tired from time to time, whether due to a late night out, traveling, staying up to watch your favorite show, or putting in extra hours at work. Oftentimes you can pinpoint the reason you're not feeling your best, but what about times when you can’t identify the cause of your fatigue? Here are four common causes of fatigue and some steps you can take to feel re-energized.

**Cause #1: Lack of Sleep**  
According to The American Academy of Sleep Medicine, people between 18 and 60 years old need [7 or more hours of sleep](https://aasm.org/resources/pdf/pressroom/adult-sleep-duration-consensus.pdf) every day to promote optimal health. Unfortunately, studies show 1 in 3 adults are consistently falling short of that recommendation. Not getting enough sleep is not just associated with fatigue, but also impaired performance, a greater risk of accidents, and multiple adverse health outcomes. Improve your sleep by following these tips:

* **Maintain a consistent sleep routine.** Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time each morning, even on the weekends.
* **Nap boundaries.** Keep naps to 20 to 30 minutes, as studies have suggested that long naps can have opposite effect and leave you feeling groggy rather than refreshed. Also, do not nap too late in the day.
* **Limit time awake in bed to 5–10 minutes.** If you find that you are lying awake in bed worrying or with your mind racing, get out of bed and sit in the dark until you are feeling sleepy, then go back to bed.
* **Ensure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and a comfortable temperature.** Any light entering your room can disturb your sleep. Make sure light emitted from digital devices is out of sight. Keeping your room at a cooler temperature can also promote sleep.
* **Limit caffeinated drinks.** The stimulating effects of caffeine can last for many hours after intake. Try not to consume caffeinated beverages after noon.
* **Avoid tobacco and alcohol before bed.** Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol before going to bed may cause fragmented sleep.

**Cause #2: Poor Diet**Eating a healthful, balanced diet can make a world of difference when it comes to eliminating fatigue. Here are some simple guidelines:

* **Eat the right amount of calories** for your sex, age, weight, and activity level. Eating either too much or too little can make you feel sluggish.
* **Fill half your plate with whole fruits and vegetables.**
* **Vary your protein.** Choose lean poultry and meat, avoid processed meats, choose unsalted raw nuts and seeds, and select some omega-3-rich seafood.
* **Cut down on sugar.** Sugary foods and drinks can give you a quick rush of energy, but that rush can wear off quickly and leave you feeling more tired.
* **Never skip breakfast.** Breakfast provides key nutrients and the energy you need to kick-start your day. It is best to start the day with protein and vegetables.
* **Eat at regular intervals.** Sustain your energy levels by eating three meals a day and limiting unhealthy snacks.
* **Drink enough water.** Drinking water helps prevent [dehydration](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/153363.php), which results in fatigue, unclear thinking, mood changes, overheating, and [constipation](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/150322.php). Aim for half your body weight in ounces of water per day.

**Cause #3: Lack of Physical Exercise**  
When you feel tired, sitting on the couch and relaxing may seem to be the only answer. But getting up and moving may be the better option. [Research](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21641846.2013.843266) by the University of Georgia found that, compared with sitting quietly, one single bout of moderate-intensity exercise lasting for at least 20 minutes helped to boost energy. An earlier [study](http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-20202-002) by UGA also found when sedentary individuals completed an exercise program regularly, their fatigue improved.  
  
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans [suggest](https://health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/summary.aspx) adults need 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. If you have not exercised for a while, start slowly. Begin with a brisk 10-minute walk each day and build up to walking fast for 30 minutes, 5 days per week. Brisk walking, water aerobics, riding a bike, playing tennis and even pushing a lawnmower are all great options.

**Cause #4: Stress**A little stress can make us more alert and able to perform better, but stress is only positive if it is short-lived. Excessive, prolonged stress can cause physical and emotional exhaustion and lead to illness. If the pressures you face are making you feel overtired, try some of these tips:

* **Identify the source.** Until you can recognize what is causing your stress, you won’t be able to control it.
* **Learn to say no.** Avoid taking on too much. Be aware of your limits and stick to them.
* **Avoid those who stress you out.** If there are people in your life causing you a significant amount of stress, try spending less time in their company.
* **Communicate your concerns.** Express your feelings instead of keeping them bottled up.
* **Accept what you can’t change.** Some sources of stress, such as an illness or the death of a loved one, are unavoidable. Often the best way to deal with stress is to try and accept things the way they are.
* **Get moving.** Physical activity can help relieve stress by releasing feel-good endorphins.

If you have made lifestyle changes to do with your physical activity, diet and stress levels, but still feel tired all the time, there could be an underlying medical condition. Arrange an appointment with your healthcare provider to discuss your concerns as soon as possible.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*