

## FATIGUE (article)

Most physicians agree the commonest physical symptom they hear from patients is fatigue. Patients who say they're simply being tired all the time, lack energy, get up in the morning feeling unrefreshed, and have little desire to participate in life because they constantly feel run down.

"I'm only twenty (or thirty, or fifty) and I shouldn't be feeling like this. I've no energy to do anything except go to work, go home, and collapse in front of the TV."

From a physician's point of view, fatigue can be a symptom of just about everything, both physical and emotional, and the main concern is to make sure a potentially dangerous condition is not being overlooked before trying to unravel the puzzle of the patient who's tired.

From my own perspective, I find that those patients who are really attuned and know how to listen to the wisdom of their bodies understand how fatigue may be a symptom of mild and temporary depression, or nutritional self-neglect, or not enough sleep, and will act accordingly. "My fatigue went away when I began taking better care of myself," remarked a young woman who listened to the messages from her body.

A carefully taken history, physical examination, and some basic screening blood and urine tests can effectively eliminate many causes of fatigue, including anemia, diabetes, kidney and liver disease. If needed, the doctor can check for HIV disease, auto immune disease or endocrine problems.

It is when the various tests are all negative that the symptom becomes progressively more difficult to solve.

Sometimes at this point, it's helpful to take a step backwards and reevaluate the whole situation. A few of the common, but unappreciated sources of fatigue include:

- Months and months of dreadful eating habits finally catching up and making themselves known. Sugar rich nutritionally poor eating is the equivalent of trying to get your Geo Metro to run on tap water. A referral to a good nutritionist (someone who teaches proper eating habits, not someone who sells you a mountain of vitamins) can be truly beneficial for a long and healthy life.
- Equal neglect of sufficient sleep. Four or five hours nightly, fueled by Starbuck's or diet colas, is asking more than your body can provide. Expect tiredness.
- Depression is always a possibility to consider once physical causes have been ruled out. That depression causes fatigue is well known and even rates a medical term, psychomotor retardation. However, constantly feeling tired will make anyone depressed so it's usually wise to eliminate physical causes before attaching a psychological label to a fatigued patient.
- Fibromyalgia is a form of fatigue accompanied by diffuse muscle achy-ness and probably more common than originally thought. Since there are no lab tests to clinch the diagnosis, it's often missed during routine blood screening tests.

Some causes of fatigue are not agreed upon by all physicians. These include:

- Intestinal candida overgrowth syndrome, popularized in the book "The Yeast Connection." Usually present in women with recurrent vaginal yeast infections and gastrointestinal com-

plaints. Various symptoms, one of which is fatigue, are produced by the breakdown products of the yeast being absorbed into the bloodstream. Other symptoms include: sugar cravings, joint pains, skin rashes, with digestive symptoms of frequent indigestion, bloating, and gas.

- Intestinal dysbiosis: after a century, doctors are still in disagreement about whether the byproducts of 'unfriendly' bacteria within the colon are absorbed and cause symptoms. The various intestinal 'clearing' programs, colonics and the like all have their basis in the dysbiosis syndrome.
- Subclinical hypothyroidism; mild thyroid underactivity too subtle to be picked up on lab tests, diagnosed by one's baseline temperature being subnormal.
- Underactive adrenal glands. These small glands atop each kidney produce hormones involved in a wide variety of body functions. Adrenal 'burnout' can occur after constant stress; can be checked for with simple lab tests and easily helped.
- Hidden food allergies and hypersensitivities. Many patients react to dairy, eggs, wheat, corn and citrus with fatigue being the only presenting symptom.
- The Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is fortunately fairly rare and, at present, diagnosed only by fairly strict history and physical criteria from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). In other words, no lab test is yet available to verify the condition and the diagnosis is usually made by eliminating everything else.

Having fatigue then is the body's most frequent way of saying something is not right and needs some investigation and minor retooling. Fortunately for everyone, fatigue is only temporary and not a bringer of bad news. On the other hand, to ignore persistent fatigue just means your neglecting yourself and sooner or later you'll be too tired to change the channels on your TV. Or too tired to call for help.