

5 STEPS FOR MANAGING FATIGUE

80% of people experience a fatigue unique to MS, called 'lassitude'.

QUICK FACTS

- MS fatigue is different from regular fatigue.
- Fatigue is the most common and debilitating symptom for many people with MS.
- May come on suddenly and worsen over the day; tends to increase with heat and humidity.
- Fatigue is invisible to others and difficult for family, friends, and colleagues to understand.
- This symptom is one of the most common reasons people with MS leave the workforce.

STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE SOURCES OF YOUR FATIGUE

80% of people experience a fatigue unique to MS, called 'lassitude'. Its cause is unknown.

Other factors that add to feelings of fatigue:

- **Disrupted sleep:** caused by trips to the bathroom, muscle spasms, periodic limb movements, pain or stress, depression or anxiety, too much screen time at night.
- **Increased energy expenditure:** caused by daily activities requiring more effort than they use to
- **Muscle fatigue:** resulting from impaired nerve signals.
- **Emotional overload:** resulting from mood changes that sap your energy.
- **Cognitive fatigue:** caused by impaired nerve signals.

STEP 2: ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

Describe your fatigue to your MS provider: For example, "My fatigue is overwhelming. I need help to sort out what's causing it and to find ways to manage it."

STEP 3: WORKING WITH THE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN HELP YOU

A **physical therapist (PT)** can recommend: an exercise program to improve your strength and endurance, as well as mobility aids to help you conserve energy.

An **occupational therapist (OT)** can teach you the **4 P's of energy conservation**: (Planning, Prioritizing, Pacing and Positioning) and recommend tools to simplify tasks.

Your **MS provider (and pharmacist)** can identify medications you are taking that may be contributing to your fatigue and may recommend medications to reduce your MS lassitude.

A **urologist** can help you manage bladder symptoms that interfere with a good night's sleep.

A **dietitian** can recommend ways to make meal-prep easier and specific foods that may increase your energy.

A **mental health professional** can teach stress management skills and diagnose/treat mood changes that are sapping your energy or disrupting your sleep.

A **speech/language pathologist** can help when your cognitive fatigue translates into "brain fog."

STEP 4: HELPING OTHERS UNDERSTAND YOUR MS FATIGUE

Fatigue is one of those invisible symptoms that others have a hard time understanding. They may think you're not interested, or you're being lazy, or you're just not trying hard enough. It's up to you to describe your fatigue in ways they can understand.

- "It's like slogging through mud with heavy boots on...."
- "I'm operating on 'empty' right now."
- "Whenever I plan, I also need a backup plan in case my fatigue kicks in. Please understand that it doesn't mean I care about you less...."
- "We all know what regular fatigue feels like, but MS fatigue is different, powerful, and overwhelming"
- "My brain just hits a wall and stops working until I give it a rest...."
- "We still want you to come for dinner, but I'll be ordering take-out for us instead of cooking up a storm. We hope that's OK with you."

Encourage them to ask questions. And be sure to give clear signals about what's going on with you. For example, a thumbs up when you're doing well and have energy to use, and a thumbs down when you're out of gas. Even people who love and care about you can't read your mind, so help them understand what's happening.

STEP 5: TAPPING HELPFUL RESOURCES

Can Do MS has a variety of helpful programs and resources when it comes to symptom management. Check out our website to explore our offerings and learn more: [CanDo-MS.org](https://www.CanDo-MS.org)

