

FIGHTING Fatigue:

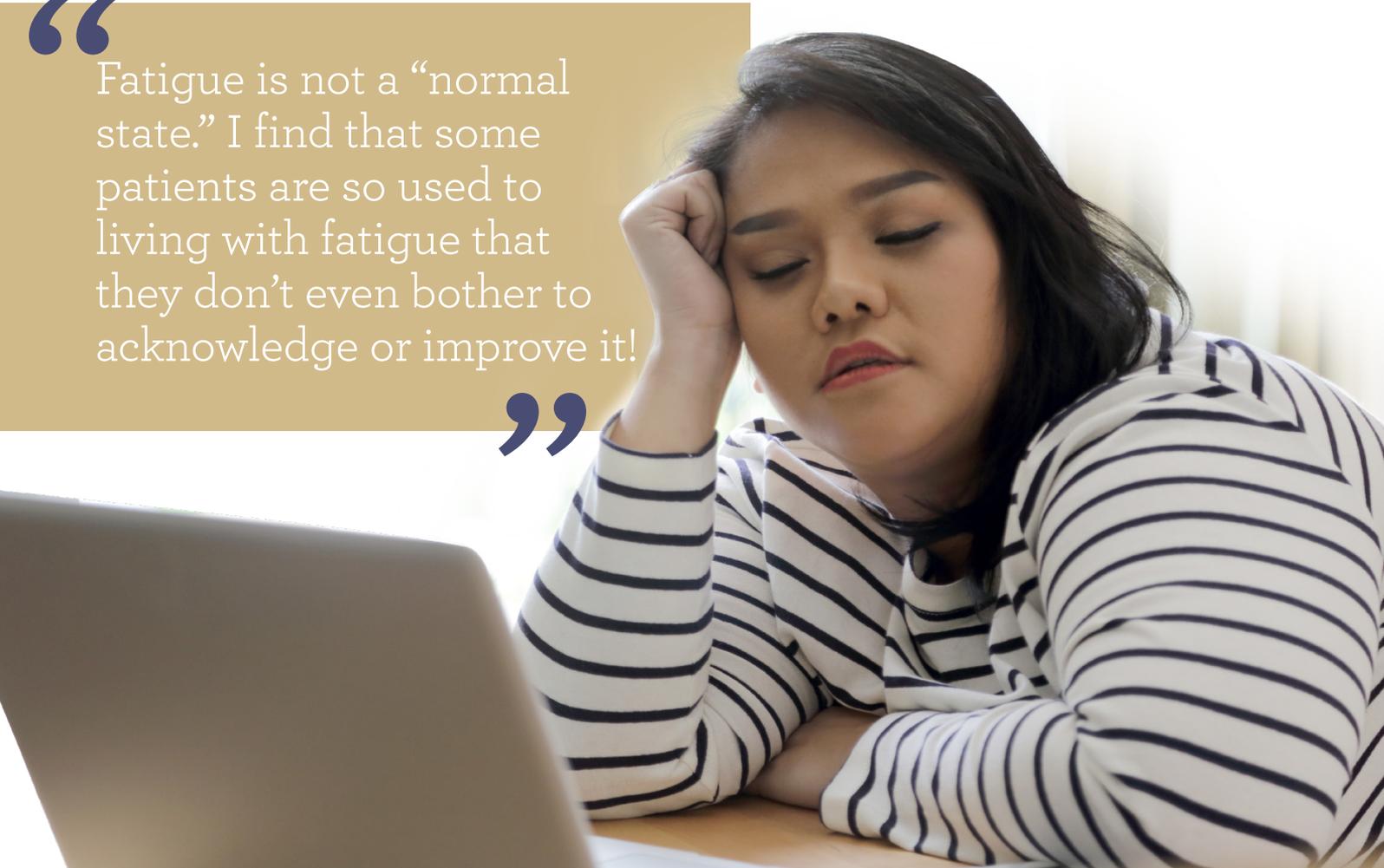
Practical Tips for Renewed Energy

by Nadia B. Pietrzykowska, MD, FACP, DABOM

Fatigue is one of the most common complaints I hear from patients who see me about concerns related to their weight. Many times, medical conditions that can cause fatigue have already been looked into or treated by other medical professionals before the patient steps foot in my office. However, fatigue commonly persists because there hasn't been a clearly defined medical cause.

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Here are some practical tips that my patients have found beneficial throughout the years:

Don't Ignore Daily Stress

Today's world is extremely demanding! Everyone's plate is full of daily tasks: work, meetings, home, family obligations, deadlines...the list goes on. Stress can drain you to the point of exhaustion just from thinking about it all.

Do we take on too much? Is society asking too much from us? Do we feel guilty about our ability to handle so many duties at once? Maybe, but stress isn't going away anytime soon. All we can do is learn to manage its effects and prevent it from taking control.

How do we do that? Ideally, we can learn to meditate or attend yoga classes. But if it's not possible to dedicate time to "structured relaxation," you can try to relax on your own. This seems simple in theory, but it can be challenging in practice – mostly because there never seems to be enough time. Do we actually think that 15 – 30 minutes of "quiet time" will really do damage?



In reality, it wouldn't do any damage – it would only be a benefit. We just have to prioritize mental health and our wellbeing. We can't be productive, efficient and happy when we drain ourselves to the point of exhaustion!

So, let's start here: Designate a small chunk of time during your day to disconnect. It doesn't have to be for a long time or even every day, but it does need to be "dedicated time." Stop running, sit on your couch, lay in your bed, close the door...whatever helps. If you don't know where to begin, download a free guided meditation app for a great start!

The response I tend to get is: "I can't! Everyone relies on me. They will be knocking at my door." However, if you're the shining light for everyone else and that light eventually dims, what do you think will happen? Wouldn't everyone be affected?

Exactly. Think about it and designate time for yourself. It will greatly benefit you and everyone else around you as well. If you're struggling with weight or weight-related conditions, stress-related fatigue can be even more overwhelming. Acknowledge what's going on and take action.

Take a Healthy Look at Your Eating Habits

As we become concerned about our weight, we're more likely to be on some form of a restricted calorie diet plan. At times, calorie restriction spirals into even more restriction... especially if desirable results aren't achieved. This can lead to unhealthy restriction that leaves us malnourished, feeling fatigued and possibly struggling even more to lose weight.

If you're restricting calories, make sure you're consuming enough food and keeping your meals balanced so that you stay energized. It can be hard to know the balance you need, so if you aren't sure how to do this, ask a professional such as a Registered Dietitian (RD) to help you.

Timing when you eat is also important. It's harmful to your weight and sleep habits if you skip meals throughout the day and eat late at night. Acid reflux and indigestion can prevent you from getting proper sleep and can result in fatigue.

Speaking of Sleep... Get Some!

I can almost count on my hands the number of patients who tell me their sleep is ideal. For one reason or another, the vast majority do not get a good night's sleep. With extra weight, conditions like sleep apnea and chronic pain are more common and can affect sleep more profoundly. If you suffer from either of those conditions, you should talk with a healthcare professional.

However, many other factors affect sleep quality including stress. For example, one can toss and turn in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep and aggravated at the ticking alarm clock. When insomnia is caused by outside factors, it's important to return to the basics and practice proper sleep hygiene. Your bedroom should be:

- Dedicated to and associated with rest
- Television-free
- Computer-free
- Cellphone-free
- Food-free

We need to leave our worries at the doorstep! That's easier said than done, but creating rituals may help you wind down and prepare for sleep. For example:

- Take a warm bath before bed.
- Relax with a good book.
- Use aromatherapy.
- Listen to guided meditation.



Alcohol Check:

Alcohol is another factor that can disturb sleep if consumed in the evening. Though you might think a glass of red wine can help you fall asleep, alcohol may cause you to wake in the middle of the night. It can also cause nightmares and night sweats. Be cautious with alcohol consumption in general, and especially before bedtime.



Caffeine Check:

For better sleep, try to avoid caffeine after 3:00 pm. If you think you need caffeine to fuel your day, think again! Excess caffeine, especially later in the day, may push you toward another failed night of sleep.



Along with the concern of how eating late can affect sleep, you should know that exercising late may also prevent you from falling asleep and sleeping well. If you think that's your case, try your best to make time for exercise earlier in the day.

With a better night's sleep, you will be more rested and better able to tackle the day. Don't underestimate the importance of sleep! It can drastically help you overcome fatigue.

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Ask Yourself: Are You in Pain?

Constant pain can be exhausting, overwhelming and depressing. In addition, medications used to treat pain can cause even more fatigue! However, losing just 10-15 percent of your body weight can alleviate pain – especially if it's related to joint or spinal issues.

Supervised physical activity can strengthen muscles, increase fitness levels and improve flexibility – all of which can help with pain in addition to the benefit of weight-loss. Finding ways to reduce pain can also reduce fatigue. Make sure you talk to a healthcare professional if you live with chronic pain.

Final Thoughts

The factors I've mentioned in this article are some of the most common causes of fatigue that I see in my practice. Fatigue should be treated seriously and medical causes should always be considered and addressed when necessary.

Fatigue is not a “normal state.” I find that some patients are so used to living with fatigue that they don't even bother to acknowledge or improve it!

If your healthcare provider tells you that your fatigue is not caused by a thyroid issue, sleep apnea or any other common medical cause, don't just settle. Make it a point to feel better by addressing some of the causes I've listed here. You will be so glad you did!

About the Author:

Nadia B. Pietrzykowska, MD, FACP, DABOM, is a Board Certified and Fellowship trained Obesity Medicine and Nutrition Physician Specialist with a primary specialty in Internal Medicine. She is the Founder and Medical Director of “Weight & Life MD,” a Center dedicated to Medical Weight Management, Preventive Medicine and Lifestyle located in Hamilton, New Jersey. She strongly believes in a personalized as well as long-term approach to treating the chronic disease of obesity and its co-morbid conditions.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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