



Fatigue and
Breathlessness Group
Information Pack

Welcome

Great Oaks welcomes you to our Fatigue and Breathlessness group. This course will run every Monday morning for four weeks at Great Oaks. The session starts at 10am and finishes at 12:00.

The course will provide you with information on Fatigue, Practical tips for Everyday Living, Energy Conservation, Sleep, Diet, Managing Breathlessness and Positioning. Some of the sessions will also include gentle exercise and relaxation. You will need to be able to participate in all of the aspects of the sessions.

The course will be run by various members of our Multi-Disciplinary team including Nurses, Occupational Therapists and Complementary Therapists.

If you are unable to attend any sessions, please contact Great Oaks on 01594 811910 or email Clerical@Great-Oaks.org.uk.

We hope you enjoy the course and will appreciate you completing the feedback form at the end. If you have any question throughout please do not hesitate to ask.

What is Fatigue?

Fatigue is a symptom described by a lot of people who have a life threatening or chronic illness. It is often reported as being a continuous feeling of exhaustion and increased need to rest. It is characterised by a lack of energy and difficulty maintaining usual activities.

Fatigue can make you feel more irritable and emotional. It can also affect your concentration and ability to concentrate. Fatigue is a very common symptom.

It can be caused by several factors including:

- Events which lead to diagnosis
- The condition itself
- Traveling to and from hospital for treatment
- Sleep / Rest patterns
- Nutrition
- The psychological effects of your illness

Managing Fatigue

There are many techniques you can try to help manage your Fatigue. These will help you to regain control and help maintain your independence. By setting small goals which are achievable, you will be able to make positive changes to your life.

Exercise and Activity

Inactivity resulting from long periods of rest can reduce your capacity for activity therefore activity will require more effort. Exercise or gentle activities can be very beneficial and help stress as well as fatigue. They also help your exercise tolerance and overall strength.

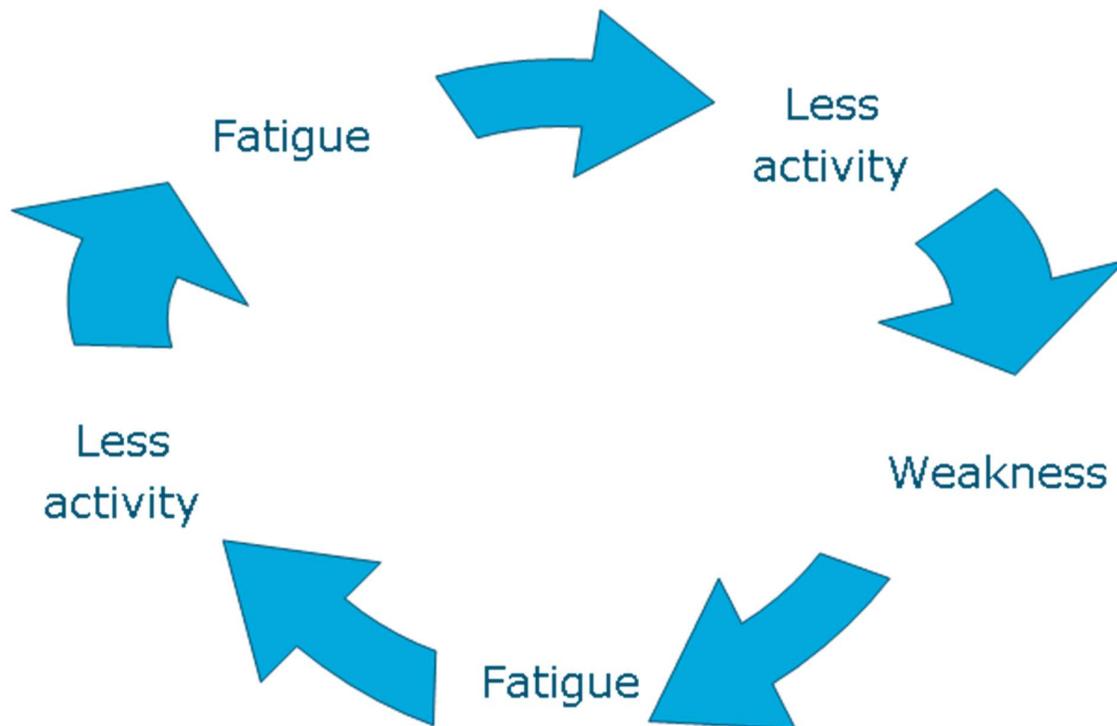
Exercise does not need to be vigorous to be classed as a workout. A short walk, chair exercises, and gentle exercise can help to reduce tension and boost energy.

You need to exercise at a time of day that suits yourself. Do a little every day however overdoing it can make you feel tired so it is important to find the right balance for yourself.

If you have any issues with your heart, pain or problems with breathing you should discuss your exercise needs with your GP.

Exercise is not only healthy it also has many other benefits which include:

- Improving mood and wellbeing
- Increasing appetite
- Decreasing nausea
- Increased muscle strength
- Improved posture
- Pain Control
- Improved sleep pattern



Fatigue can cause us to avoid activity. This then causes weakness and joint and muscle stiffness or pain. It is a vicious circle as we then feel more fatigued and therefore are less likely to exercise. In order to beat fatigue, we need to break the cycle.

Muscles that are weak and tired require more oxygen which can lead to breathlessness. By improving our exercise tolerance we can help the symptom of breathlessness by decreasing the demand for Oxygen.

Managing your Energy

Fatigue can be seen as lost energy. Energy can be lost through Poor Posture and Pain.

Poor Posture

Good posture is when you can drop an imaginary line through the top of the shoulder to the middle of the hip joint, back of the knee and front of the ankle joint. Often when we have poor posture, we round our shoulders or lean towards one side. When we do this we put extra pressure on our breathing

and accessory muscles. This uses energy which leads to fatigue. Therefore good posture is essential to help ease fatigue.

Pain

Pain can alter our posture. We tense when we are in pain in order to protect the painful areas which can lead to muscle spasms. If pain is an ongoing issue or not controlled speak with your GP. Relaxation techniques can help to relax muscles and decrease any tension.

Stress and Anxiety

As already mentioned, stress or anxiety use up energy and contribute to fatigue. There are three major skills to master in order to fight tension; learning to recognise the feelings of tension, learning to relax, and learning to use abdominal breathing. When used together these skills will enable you to control anxiety, relax and rejuvenate in almost any situation.

Relaxation takes different forms for different people; massage, reading, TV, music or specific techniques which will be demonstrated within this group. Try and practice each of the relaxation exercises at home using the CD provided or written handouts.

To practice the relaxation exercises all you need is 20 minutes seated or lying comfortably in a quiet room where you will not be disturbed (put the phone on silent.)

It is important for you that it is incorporated into your daily routine, to allow you time to switch off and regain a sense of control.

Plan treats for yourself. Coping with your changing situation can cause mental fatigue. Be aware of your limitations and inform others when you feel overwhelmed.

Avoid thinking "I should" or "I must" rather "I choose", to give you a feeling of control.

Practical Ways to Conserve Your Energy

Activities of daily living

Showering

- Wash hair in shower, not over the sink
- Install a grab rail
- Sit to shower/bath. A shower board may be helpful
- Use a shower mitt or sponge rather than wringing a facecloth

Grooming / Personal Hygiene

- Sit rather than stand
- Rest elbows on dressing table / sink
- Use a raised toilet seat.

Dressing

- Use loose fitting clothes
- Organise yourself early so you don't have to rush
- Lay clothes out before starting, to avoid having to walk back and forth
- Use a long handled shoe horn/sock aid/tights aid, if needed.
- Sit rather than stand

Walking

- Wear secure/non slip shoes
- Use a wheelchair for longer trips e.g. shopping.
- Maintain good posture
- Place chairs at "rest points" in the house

General

- Spread tasks over the week
- Do a little bit each day
- Delegate heavy work
- Sit when you can

Shopping

- Enquire about shopping by phone or catalogue
- Make a list
- Use a power scooter if the shop has one
- Request assistance with getting groceries into the car

- Shop with a friend
- Rest before going out
- Use Email

Meal Preparation

- Plan menus for a week
- Use frozen mixes and pre-packaged foods
- Use electric appliances if possible e.g. can opener, knife, blender, microwave
- Transport items on a trolley.
- Cook twice as much and freeze half
- Use a non-slip mat or damp towel under bowls to prevent them slipping
- Use a perforated ladle to lift vegetables out of the saucepan, leave the water until cool
- Leave dishes to drip dry
- If possible set the table for the next meal after washing and drying dishes to save putting dishes away and then taking out later.

Storage

- Store all items used frequently at waist height to avoid bending
- Store items used often close to the work area

Laundry

- Sort out laundry on the table instead of the floor to eliminate stooping/twisting
- Sit to transfer clothes into the washing machine/dryer
- Put a basket on a chair to avoid bending when hanging clothes on the line
- Fold clothes as you take them off the line to minimise creases
- Sit to iron
- Use a steam iron if possible
- Don't iron unnecessarily e.g. tea towels, underwear

Child Care

- Plan activities around the table, not the floor
- Teach small children to climb onto your lap instead of being lifted
- Teach children to make a game of some household chores
- Get them to stand on a chair/bed if you're helping them to dress to avoid bending/stooping

Bed Making

- Use fitted sheets and quilts

- Get someone else to push the bed in/out, and turn the mattress when needed

Cleaning

- Use a basket or trolley to carry your cleaning supplies
- Keep duplicates of cleaning equipment in places where its used frequently e.g. bathroom, kitchen

Gardening

- Sit when you can
- Buy equipment to help you get up/down
- Use long handled spades, trowels etc.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

You can save energy by reorganising activities. Plan periods of activity and rest, doing things “little and often”. Make sure you do not do too much as you may suffer from tiredness the next day. It is difficult to get the right balance between doing things and taking rest. Sometimes this is learnt through trial and error.

Planning/Scheduling

- When is your energy at its highest?
- Which activity can be done then?
- Which activities can be postponed?
- Can any be combined or modified?

Prioritising

- Rank in order of priority your tasks for each day.

Pacing

- Try to take frequent rests
- Do a little at a time, if you are tired after 20 minutes activity, stop after 10 minutes.

Modifying

- Do a task differently
- Organise home environment differently
- Use labour saving products

Eliminate non-essential activities

If it isn't necessary, don't do it. Can a task/activity be reorganised to eliminate parts of that task. Delegate, ask someone else to do it and don't feel guilty. It is important to save energy for fun.

Fatigue Profile

Date	1	2	3	4	5	Activity
Early Morning						
Late Morning						
Early afternoon						
Late afternoon						
Early evening						
Late evening						

Date	1	2	3	4	5	Activity
Early Morning						
Late Morning						
Early afternoon						
Late afternoon						
Early evening						
Late evening						

Please place a tick to note your level of tiredness
1 = not tired at all ☐ 6 = extremely tired

Prioritising your Day

	<u>AM</u>	<u>PM</u>
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

SLEEP

Improving your sleep

Sleep is frequently a problem, and you have probably found that your sleep is not nearly as refreshing as it was before you became ill. Common difficulties that people have include sleeping too much, difficulty falling asleep and broken sleep.

There are several factors that can influence sleep. One of the most important influences is daytime inactivity, which can lead to increased feelings of fatigue, coupled with inability to actually get to sleep at night. By gradually increasing your daytime activity and reducing excessive rest, you should notice an improvement in your sleep pattern. A nap in the day can be restorative as long as it is not more than 40 mins.

Establishing a routine

- Get up at the same time each morning, irrespective of what time you fell asleep the night before. The effect of sleeping late into the morning or afternoon is that you may not be able to sleep when you go to bed at night.
- If you are tending to sleep too much and/or are sleeping long into the day, gradually cut back by getting up 15 minutes earlier until you reach your target time. Don't compensate by going to bed earlier; if you go to bed at your normal time you may initially find that you feel more tired, but your body will then start to compensate with deeper, more refreshing sleep. In other words, the quality will improve.

Preparing for sleep

- A set routine will help you prepare for sleep, try to wind down during the hour or so before you go to bed, include some sort of relaxation, such as having a warm bath, and watching television. Develop a regular order of doing things that will act as signals to your body that it is preparing for sleep, such as brushing your teeth or reading.

Creating an appropriate sleep environment

- In order to re-establish regular sleep patterns, it is important that your bedroom becomes associated with sleep, rather than wakefulness.
- When you in bed and have turned out the light, if you are not asleep within a short time (about 10-15 minutes) and are feeling restless don't continue lying there. Instead do something which will occupy you such as reading a magazine, watching some TV, or making a drink, ideally in another room. Don't try to get back to sleep too soon; wait until you notice signs of drowsiness.
- You will find that the association between the bedroom and sleeplessness will weaken, and it will become easier to go to and maintain sleep.

Reducing worry at night

- Try not to worry if you are awake at night, as this can keep you awake; remember that lying in bed, relaxed, is refreshing, even if you are not asleep.
- If you often find yourself lying awake at night, worrying about problems, it may be worth putting aside a specific amount of 'worry time' every day when you can deal with such problems (only do this during the day, or at least two hours before you go to bed). Write down the problems that are worrying you, and possible steps towards resolving them. If you wake or cannot get to sleep for worrying about the problem, remind yourself that you have the matter in hand and that worrying about it now will not help. If a new worry occurs to you, write it down or remember it to deal with in the next 'worry time'. It may be useful to use this time to practice your relaxation techniques.

Stimulants

- Try to avoid stimulants within 4-6 hours of going to bed; this includes coffee, tea, chocolate drinks, fizzy drinks, and cigarettes. If you do drink alcohol, try to avoid doing so within the last 2 hours of preparing for bed.
- Finally it does take time, sometimes weeks, to develop new sleep habits, so don't be disappointed if they do not work quickly. As long as you persevere, you will be able to establish a regular, refreshing sleep pattern.

Summary

- Establish a routine during the day – avoid naps.
- Do not take substances containing caffeine, e.g. coffee, tea, chocolate, within a few hours of going to bed
- Exercise regularly. The best time to exercise is in the late afternoon.
- Make your sleep environment conducive to sleep, e.g. adjust room temperature and levels of light and noise
- Establish a regular routine to help you ‘wind down’. Avoid activities that make you alert.
- If you are not asleep within a short time, about 10 minutes, get out of bed and go into another room. Engage in some ‘relaxing’ activity until you begin to feel sleepy, and then return to bed.

REMEMBER DON'T LOSE SLEEP OVER LOSING SLEEP!

Sleep Diary

Below is a list of techniques that may help if you are having sleep difficulties. The first column on the right allows you to tick off the techniques you have tried, and the second column you can record if you have found them helpful. For most people it is a combination of factors which can help to improve their sleep.

Techniques	Tried	Helpful
Sleep Diary		
Waking up at a regular time		
Having a wind down period		
Using bedroom only for sleep (no TV, computer / admin use)		
Not staying in bed when asleep		
Avoid napping in the day as much as possible if night sleep is a problem		
Making environment more conducive to sleep (temperature, removing clocks)		
Balancing activity and rest during the day		
Avoid stimulants		
Avoid excess alcohol		
Writing down worrying thoughts rather than thinking about them		
Relaxation / Breathing techniques		
Using medication to relieve symptoms as advised		
Adjusting sleep times		

Sleep Diary

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Mon</u>	<u>Tue</u>	<u>Wed</u>	<u>Thur</u>	<u>Fri</u>	<u>Sat</u>	<u>Sun</u>
Went to bed at....							
Turned light out at....							
Estimate of time you fell asleep							
No of times sleep interrupted							
For how long each time....							
Why was your sleep interrupted?							
Woke up at....							
Got up at....							
Fatigue level on waking 0-10							
Time spent napping in the day							
Number of hours asleep overall							

NUTRITION

Poor appetite can be associated with life threatening diseases, because of treatment, drugs, the actual disease, and many other reasons, this may mean that you have less energy.

Problems such as sickness, having a sore mouth, difficulties in swallowing or changes in your bowel movements can reduce the amount that you feel able to eat.

Help and advice can be provided by your health care professional and you may need to be referred to a dietician.

Helpful Diet Tips

If you have a reduced appetite it requires a lot of effort to prepare meals, and you then have to find the energy to eat and enjoy what you have prepared.

Here are some useful suggestions that might help you:

1. Try to prepare meals in advance if possible or ask others to help.
2. Ask friends and family to help with shopping and stock upon foods that will last for some time, or shop on line.
3. Cold meals can be as good for you as hot meals and quicker to prepare.
4. Softer foods and puddings may take less effort to eat. e.g. shepherd's pie, fish, scrambled eggs.
5. Microwaving food or ready-made meals, whether fresh, frozen or canned, can save time and effort.
6. Eating small meals/snacks more frequently may be easier to face than 3 larger meals. It can be useful to have meals on a smaller plate so that you do not feel over whelmed by a large amount of food.
7. Try to drink plenty of liquids; Milk, milk shakes, glucose drinks or nutritional supplements can also provide you with extra nutrients and you can add cream to soups etc to increase calorie intake

8. Fresh fruit and vegetable are a valuable source of nutrition.
9. A small amount of alcohol taken before a meal e.g. sherry, or Guinness can stimulate your appetite.
10. Prepare twice as much food and freeze half.

Please speak to a health care professional if you are concerned about weight loss, eating, drinking or alcohol related issues.

Fortifying foods

Fortifying food means adding to them. Eat as much energy rich food as possible. Energy is measured in calories and the main sources are fats, protein and carbohydrates.

Tips for fortifying foods:

- You can make fortified milk by adding 2-4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to a pint (450mls) of full cream milk. Keep it in the fridge and use in drinks or cooking
- Fat has the highest amount of energy so try to use full fat products where possible – use full fat milk, cheese and yoghurt
- Add cream to soup and porridges
- Mash potatoes with full cream milk, butter and double cream with grated cheese or beaten egg
- Milk, eggs, meat, fish and pulses are a good source of protein
- Ice Cream, custard, rice pudding, cake and dried fruit are good to eat

BREATHLESSNESS MANAGEMENT

Breathlessness

Breathlessness (sometimes called Dyspnoea) can be very difficult and uncomfortable – but can be helped in several ways.

The combination of good medical management, use of non-medical techniques, and a better understanding of the trigger factors causing the breathlessness can help alleviate this frightening and overwhelming feeling. The causes can be physical, emotional, or psychological and often a combination of all these.

As we get more breathless this causes an impact on each other, often leading to a sense of feeling out of control.

An episode of breathlessness may be relieved by using simple strategies to promote more comfortable breathing.

Practice Breathing Control Techniques

Our diaphragm is an important muscle for breathing that is often used incorrectly. Using techniques to efficiently use the diaphragm can lead to a decreased work of breathing and therefore reduce feelings of breathlessness.

Try the following technique and remember to practice it regularly:

- Settle yourself into a comfortable position – in high sitting with your back supported by pillows or in side lying.
- Keep upper shoulders and chest relaxed.
- Rest your hands on lower rib cage or abdomen (give a little cough – the muscle you feel is your diaphragm)
- Concentrate on the rise and fall of your stomach as you breathe in and out. With the stomach rising as you inhale and falling as you exhale. These should be gentle breaths and small movements.

- If you can, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Make the breath out twice as long as the breath in. Try counting 1 as you breathe in and then 2, 3 as you breathe out.
- It may help to purse your lips into a kiss as you breathe out.
- Breathe at a rate that feels comfortable – it will slow down as control is regained.

Use of a Fan/Cold Air

The sensation of moving air around the nostrils can relieve breathlessness. This can be achieved by:

- hand held fan
- floor / table fan
- open window
- gentle breeze

Gentle shoulder massage

When we are tense our shoulders and upper chest do the work of breathing – tiring us more and placing more demand for Oxygen. Gentle massage can be helpful.

Loose clothing

Try not wearing a collar and tie – or unhooking your bra!

Have sips of cool water

Positioning

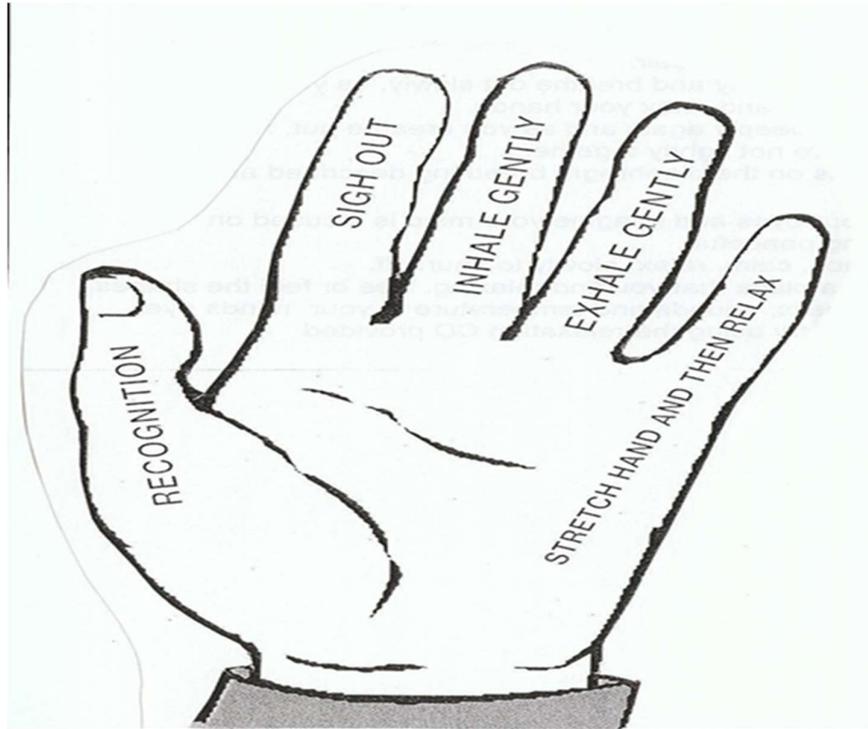


The secret of these positions is to be relaxed as possible therefore reducing the demand for Oxygen in the body.
Remember everyone is different so you will have to work out which positions are good for you.

Use of Acupuncture / Acupressure points

There is increasing evidence that acupuncture points can be stimulated or calmed by the use of pressure. Please see the attached sheet for more details.

Use of Calming hand



1. **Recognition** – acceptance you are starting a breathless episode or panic attack
2. **Sigh Out** – helps shoulders to relax, slows heart rate.
- 3 & 4. **Inhale and Exhale gently** – controlled breathing concentrating on exhalation quickly restore O₂ / CO₂ levels to normal.
5. **Stretch fingers and fully relax.**