

Why is tiredness a symptom of chronic illness?

Tiredness or fatigue is the body's warning signal that your energy levels are low. The function of tiredness is that it makes you slow down and conserve your energy. The reasons for tiredness in chronic illness vary, depending on what illness you may have and how it affects you. Most chronic illness sufferers already have low energy reserves and have to burn up even more energy than they can afford, to fight daily against their illness. Others have overwhelming tiredness as a symptom of depression, anxiety or stress. Even if the illness has a psychological trigger, the tiredness experienced is very physical. Whatever the cause of tiredness the effect is the same, energy is quickly depleted, leaving an already low energy bank. It is therefore difficult to keep up your daily activities at a normal level. Other factors can influence and increase the degree of your tiredness. These include environmental and physical factors:-

Environmental factors

- If you have little or no support from carers, family or friends
- If your environment continually causes you to have interrupted sleep and rest.
- If your work is demanding, either physically or mentally.
- Your home life is demanding, either physically or mentally
- If you are experiencing a life crisis, e.g. death in the family, divorce, financial problems etc
- Hospitals are some of the worst places to actually get a good quality sleep

Physical factors

- How controlled your illness is, although many people have ongoing fatigue, even when they are in remission.
- If you smoke or drink excessive alcohol.
- If you have unrelieved anxiety, depression or stress
- If your blood pressure is very low.
- If you have heart or lung disease. Low oxygen cannot give your system the sufficient energy to every cell, thus causing tiredness.
- Infection can use up a large amount of energy as your body fights against it.
- Dehydration.
- Insufficient nutrition, due to an unhealthy diet or not eating enough, can lead to a form of malnutrition and as healthy food is one of the main ways the body can manufacture energy, you are not supplying the fuel needed.
- Lack of physical fitness due to; - prolonged bed rest, inability to move, unable to walk far or feeling "out of shape."
- Pain can cause interrupted sleep and insomnia
- Ongoing inflammation
- Steroids and other medication side-effects.
- Autoimmune Disease

Tiredness can be improved by:-

- Keeping as active as possible
- Good sleeping habits
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Healthy diet
- If you have depression, seek medical advice.