

HOW TO LESSEN THE FATIGUE THAT COMES WITH ALS

People who suffer from ALS often have to deal with fatigue as a result of the weakening and cramping of the muscles. This fatigue can go from a mild fatigue to extreme exhaustion. Pamela Cazzolli, a head nurse connected to the ALS league from Ohio, says that you can lessen the symptoms of fatigue by, first of all, being alert for the first signs of fatigue. When you notice these signs, you have to have a break in time so the fatigue remains limited. Furthermore it also helps to find out more about which factors can worsen the symptoms of fatigue. Some factors can be avoided after all. By being aware of which factors can bring about fatigue and worsen them you can also exercise control over this fatigue. Last of all you can limit the fatigue by applying strategies which spare your own strength and energy as much as possible. In the following piece the first signs of fatigue, the factors which worsen said fatigue and some anti-fatigue strategies will be discussed.

The first signs of fatigue:

Moving and speaking slower, giving short answers, talking more quietly and in a more monotone manner, being short of breath, sighing more, less appetite, increased irritability, fear, a crying fit or laughing less, not enjoying the things you usually enjoy as much, caring less about things you used to find important, being forgetful, a less groomed appearance, rather wanting to be alone, not interested in making everyday decisions.

Factors which worsen fatigue:

Immobility, executing activities that are too heavy, sleeping problems, pain, extreme weight loss, not enough vitamins, trouble breathing, stress, fear, hopelessness, sadness, extreme weather (too hot or cold), certain medicine (e.g. tranquilizers, painkillers, antihistamine, muscle relaxers, sedatives), alcohol, smoking, the fact that there is no help present when it's needed, lack of money, a house that isn't adjusted according to the mobility problems (e.g. stairs, large distance between rooms).

Anti-fatigue strategies:

- Learn methods to make tasks easier and use tools. If you have trouble walking, use a wheelchair. An electric chair is favorable compared to a manual wheelchair when manually operating the wheelchair demands too much energy.
- Always walk at the same pace. Move slowly and regularly stop to rest. Take a few deep breaths before you move along a bit again. When you're out of breath, it's

time to stop. Execute harder tasks during those moments of the day when you have the most energy. Plan your activities and gather everything you need for it before you begin with the activity. Ask help when you can use it. Always save enough energy to be able to enjoy at least one valuable event.

- Switch up active periods with resting periods. Stick to a few set resting periods each day, for example one hour in the morning, after caregiving, and an hour in the early afternoon. Rest each time before you leave.
- Make sure you have a disabled person's parking card so you don't need to walk any unnecessary distances.
- Stick to a set sleeping pattern. If you wake up at night, try to find the cause of this and try to fix it.
- Avoid long hot baths because they can worsen the fatigue of the muscles. Be careful with extreme outside temperatures (too hot or too cold).
- Eat as healthy and varied as possible and try to keep weight loss to a minimum. You can consider consulting a dietician.
- Avoid stressful situations as much as possible. Let people from your surroundings know about the fact that emotional outbursts aren't a personal attack but caused by your fatigue.
- If you, after taking certain medicine, feel weaker or have trouble breathing, let your doctor know as soon as you can. Perhaps a different type of medicine is more suited to you or maybe the dose needs to be adjusted. However, breathing problems can also be the result of ALS itself. In that case it's advised to request an examination with a lung specialist.

- Adapt your surroundings to your daily activities. Remove furniture and other obstacles which keep you from taking the shortest way from one space to another, so you don't lose too much energy. Make sure you don't have to go long distances at home. You could for example put your bed in a different room.

Even though it's impossible to exclude fatigue entirely with ALS, you can still exercise a certain control over it. By adequately dealing with your energy and your fatigue you'll be able to improve your life quality and you'll have the power and courage to keep going.

Translation: **Sara De Roy**