



ON FATIGUE

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*Those who flow as life flows
Feel no wear, feel no tear,
Need no mending, no repair.
Lao Tzu, Taoist Sage, c300BC**

WHAT IS FATIGUE?

Fatigue is a general sense of bodily weakness and exhaustion, often also accompanied by mental, emotional, and spiritual sensations of fear, collapse, uncontrollable irritability or actual burn-out. Of course there are many causes, from overwork (the commonest cause) to underlying disease (anemia, cancer, diabetes, heart disease...), to the effects of prolonged pain or obesity.

Asian medicine has developed sophisticated ideas about how to treat fatigue. If you suffer from fatigue—not the kind that is healed by a good night's sleep, but the kind that feels deep and unremitting—then talk to your acupuncturist (and your MD) for a good work-up.

CHINESE MEDICINE PERSPECTIVES

East Asian medicine is an 'energy-based' medicine—it explains disorder in terms of the quality of flow of energy in your body. You have probably heard about Yin and Yang—two qualities of energy. Yin energy is nutritive, heavier, thicker; Yang energy is fiery, lighter, rising. Together they feed and move your body.

If one is out of balance, energy does not flow smoothly. A person with a deficiency of Yin is likely to have flashes of heat at odd moments, digestive problems, nervousness, foggy brain, maybe insomnia, and fatigue. A person with a deficiency of Yang is likely to feel cold, either all over or mainly in hands and feet, be lethargic, possibly short of breath, and without ambition. Another major cause of fatigue is stuck or stagnant energy—energy that is not moving. Common symptoms of stuck energy are bloating, swelling, irritability, constipation, PMS, migraines, and so on. These conditions can be remedied with acupuncture, often supported by herbs.

Your acupuncturist will treat you with acupuncture needles—very fine flexible single-use needles. These will be put into points that are known to relieve fatigue. Those who are too chilly will be offered moxibustion, or warming herbs over acupoints, which sends heat deep into the body and re-energizes the "fire of life." There are also excellent herbal combinations to support Yin or Yang, or move stagnation. Fatigue-fighting herbals may be given names like "Immune-Plus" or may have the word 'emperor' in its title, signifying its power!

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

Make lifestyle modifications—these habits of good living alone can heal much fatigue.

1. Lead a regular life. Your body thrives on predictability, so try to go to sleep at the same time each day, and eat your meals at the same times too. Do not skip meals. Do not sleep 10 hours one night and 6 the next. A sign of a regular life is having a BM at about the same time every day, preferably just after breakfast.

2. Drink Water! Dehydration is a major cause of fatigue. Another potent cause is toxicity from poor choices of liquids. The very best liquid for your body is water. Limit your use of other liquids, but drink plenty of water. Strictly avoid sodas, especially 'diet' sodas (you don't need the sugar, caffeine, or the toxic fake sugars). Limit your use of dehydrating coffee and alcohol—and for every ounce of these you drink, add an ounce of water. Remember that juices are very sweet—substitute fresh fruits. Remember milk is best for calves—so limit your use and get your calcium from fish, green leafy vegetables, nuts and seeds, and mineral supplements.

3. Eat Protein! Protein is the *only* nutrient that helps rebuild the body. People who are ill, overworking, suffering from grief or depression, or highly stressed, need *more* protein than others. Get protein from FRESH fish and shellfish, tofu, beans and lentils, fresh roasted nuts and

seeds, white or red meats, and from cheese and (plain) yogurt. Avoid packaged and preserved meats—they expose you to excess salt and many toxins. Choose lean clean meats.

4. Eat Vegetables! Vegetables are the perfect accompaniment to protein foods. Protein is relatively difficult for the body to digest and detoxify, while vegetables support and enhance digestion. They also provide lots of vitamins, minerals, fiber, natural sugars, and tons of flavor. Aim to put a rainbow on your plate—the more intense the colors of vegetables, the more protective elements they contain. As always, avoid canned and preserved veggies. Balance your protein and vegetable intake like this: if you eat 4 oz of a protein source, add 8 oz of vegetables. By the way, lettuce & cucumber taste good but don't count as 'vegetables' for they haven't got much in the way of nutritional value. So have a salad, but also have a full serving of 'real' vegetables at least twice a day.

5. Avoid Junk & Fake Foods. Digestion is a complicated process. Though we can digest a huge range of foods, *fake* foods—packaged, preserved, greasy, stimulating, sugary, white flour based—put a big stress on the liver, pancreas, and adrenals, encourage weight gain, and should be avoided.

Sugar is probably the most fatiguing of all foods. When you eat sugar or foods that behave like sugar in your body (= sodas, breakfast cereal, granola bars, pasta salad, spaghetti, white bread, crackers, bagels, chips...) your body responds by pumping out insulin. You get a quick jolt of energy, but an equally quick fall soon after. Then you are hungry again, eat again, and...your body experiences a carousel ride of highs and lows. This is very fatiguing to the pancreas...and sets you up for diabetes. Meanwhile, uncontrollable hunger leads to weight gain. The 'obesity epidemic' in the US can be laid squarely at the door of poor diet—overuse of sweets, white flour products, and packaged preserved foods.

Toxins—like preservatives, pesticides, herbicides, antibiotic residues, trans-fatty acids—all stress the liver, whose job is to detoxify waste in your bloodstream. You find these substances in preserved and packaged foods, in the milk and meat supply, and in any food that is listed as containing 'hydrogenated' oils. You can avoid some by using fresh foods, and washing fruits and veggies before use. In the case of antibiotics, your best bet is to buy organic milk products and meats. Avoid products containing trans-fatty acids/ hydrogenated fats.

Stimulants (coffee, tea, many sodas), and depressants (alcohol) are also fatiguing. Alcohol must be detoxified by the liver. Caffeine puts stress on the adrenals, urging your body into a constant state of 'fight or flight'. If you stop using these foods you will experience symptoms while you detox, but afterwards you will miss them less and less.

Fake foods include fake sugar and fake fat. These are toxins to the human body. Avoid all 'diet' foods and sodas and chewing gum—saccharine, aspartame, olestra, and the like. Ironically these foods promote weight gain because they do not feed your body, so you stay hungry. They are also toxic and stress the liver. Aspartame is a potent nerve toxin and addictive --read more about it on the Internet, but most of all, do not use it.

6. Exercise! Exercise moves Qi and Blood, helps your body detoxify, oxygenates your tissues so you have more energy, and generally makes you feel better. Yes, it can be hard to begin, but it's worth it—if you really resist, see an exercise specialist to help you find pleasing ways to exercise.

7. Sleep! A major cause of fatigue is...not allowing yourself enough sleep so you can recover from the stresses of the day! An adult needs 7-8 hours per day, and a teen needs 9 – 10 hours. You can't make it all up in one weekend of lying about...part of regularity is getting enough sleep each and every night.

8. Slow Down and Relax! We live in a manic society, everyone trying to do more and more in the same time. No wonder we get tired! Learn to slow down, find cooking meditative, take up a slow hobby, spend time just breathing, laugh as much as possible. These are potent healers of fatigue and all the accompanying distresses. Enjoy...and Good Luck!