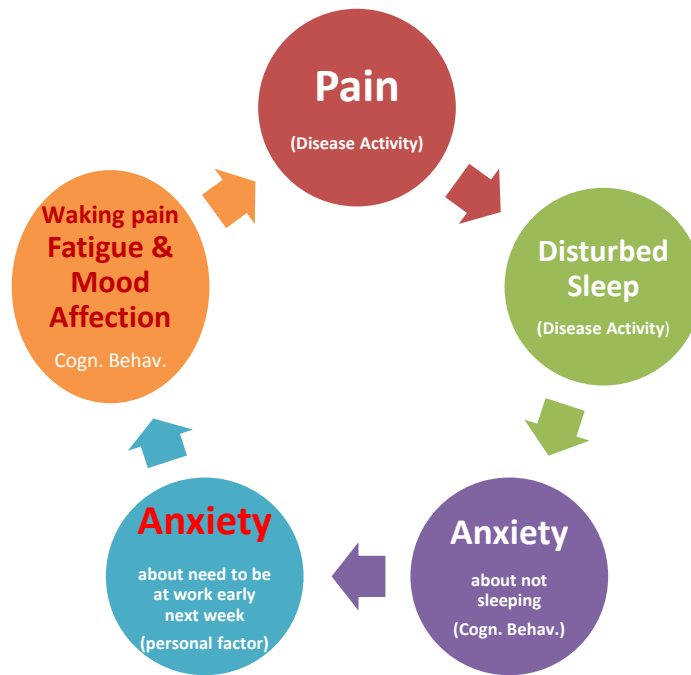


Fatigue Management



Dealing With Fatigue

Fatigue is a common problem in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), with 42%–69% reporting severe fatigue. RA fatigue can have as much impact as and be as difficult to cope with as pain. Indeed, some studies report fatigue severity levels in RA similar to those seen in chronic fatigue syndrome, and higher than in cancer

Study Shows Disease Impact

One study involving rheumatoid arthritis patients revealed that:

- 79% had some level of difficulty performing housework tasks such as vacuuming
- 68% had difficulties with dressing tasks such as tying shoelaces or doing buttons
- 64% had difficulty climbing a short flight of stairs or taking a bath

Tasks taken for granted by healthy individuals require special effort, forethought, and often dependence on others for people living with rheumatoid arthritis.

Fatigue can be considered a directive of daily living with chronic arthritis. Fatigue can be considered a warning by the body that you need rest. Without fatigue as an indicator you would likely push yourself to do more and cause harm to your body and your joints.

What Causes Fatigue?

There are several factors which cause fatigue.

Disease Activity

Fatigue can be caused by the disease itself. Fatigue is a known symptom of arthritis and related diseases and becomes a greater problem during periods of flare in disease activity. Fatigue is a result of the body's reaction to substances released in the bloodstream by activated immune cells.

Overdoing

As already discussed, routine and basic tasks are more difficult for people with arthritis than healthy people. These tasks cause more of a drain on the energy level of arthritis patients allowing less energy leftover for other things. As the person pushes to do more and more, fatigue and pain are amplified.

Sleep Deprivation

The pain and discomfort of arthritis leads to interrupted sleep patterns for many sufferers. One arthritis study revealed more than half of the participants complained of interrupted or shortened sleep cycles due to their disease.

Emotional Factors

A person can also become fatigued because of how they feel emotionally as well as physically. Feelings of depression, boredom, worry, or unhappiness can be sources of exhausted energy.

Anemia

A low number of red blood cells and/or hemoglobin is common in people who have chronic inflammatory arthritis. Fatigue can be a physical effect of anemia. The severity of the fatigue is proportionate to the severity of the anemic condition.

Medication

Medications are used to cause chemical changes within the body and fatigue can be a resulting side effect. As with any side effect, the level of fatigue can be drug specific or dosage dependent.

Coping With Fatigue

The key response to fatigue must be energy preservation.

Rest

Rest is the most obvious solution to coping with fatigue. When the body signals that it has reached a physical limit, a short nap or sleep period is the needed response. By responding with a rest period you give the body a chance to regain control.

Planning Ahead

Planning ahead, scheduling activities, and pacing yourself can help minimize the intrusion of fatigue. Limiting the number of strenuous activities, allowing interspersed rest periods, and remaining flexible can favor preserving energy.

Prioritize

Prioritizing activities helps curtail fatigue. Important activities should be done first before energy becomes depleted and less significant activities can be delayed if needed.

Organize

Whenever possible reorganize to make things more convenient. Keeping things within reach or nearby can be energy saving mechanisms.

Exercise / Weight Control

Maintaining a healthy weight and participating in regular exercise may also help reduce symptoms of chronic fatigue.

- **Keep a Fatigue Diary:** Track your Fatigue and sleep and other behaviors for several days to make connections between your daily activities and your fatigue and sleep quality.