What Can Cause Fatigue?

It’s All About Energy
In order for the body to function optimally, it has to have energy. Whether this is for everyday living or a very hard workout, if energy is not coming in, there won’t be any going out. So what might cause fatigue?

Hydration, Hydration, Hydration
Fatigue can be a symptom of dehydration. Given that our bodies are more water than anything else, remind yourself of the need to keep it replenished. Evaluate how much water and fluid you’ve had in a day. If exercising outdoors, take into consideration the elements. Heat, humidity and length of time exposed to the sun and cold can all increase your need for fluids. Aim for a minimum of 6-8, eight-ounce glasses per day.

Although fluid tolerance depends on many things, well hydrated individuals do find that they have to pee at least 2-3 times per day. If you find that need to go less often, perhaps you are somewhat dehydrated.

Anemia
Iron deficiency anemia can present with symptoms that are very similar to sleep deprivation and so the two are often confused. Chronic fatigue, that does not seem to go away regardless of how much or how little you sleep, can be a sign of low iron stores or iron deficiency anemia. Schedule an appointment with a provider at Student Health to rule out this possibility. It is easily treated with diet and iron supplements.

Inadequate Calorie Intake
• If you are working out, make sure that you are giving your body enough fuel to do so. Sometimes we forget that when we require the body to do more, (assuming you are not trying to lose weight) we need to give it "slightly" more energy.

• If you’re trying to lose weight, make sure you haven’t decreased your calorie intake too much, resulting in an overly slowed metabolism. Although any decrease in eating can lower your metabolism, cutting back too much, can stall the metabolism. Ideally, try not to decrease your intake by more than 500 calories/day. This would allow for an approximately 1 lb. per week weight loss and minimize a decrease in your metabolism. Weight loss will vary from individual to individual based on many factors including height, weight, gender, age and genetics.

Too Many Sugary Carbohydrates
Simple sugars are broken down and stored very quickly. Consumption of sweets i.e. chocolate, Swedish fish, gummy bears, bin candy, and cookies can cause a very rapid rise in blood sugar. Consumption of a lot of refined flours; pizza, bread, muffins, donuts etc. may have the same effect. The immediate response is a feeling of energy. However, within an hour, this feeling is often replaced with fatigue, as the blood sugar has been effectively stored by that time. You may wish to consider setting up an appointment with one of the dietitians at Student Health to help you develop strategies for eating for sustained energy.

Not Enough Sleep
• Don’t overlook sleep. As much as you may not be able to get 8 hours per night, do the best you can to get at least 6 hours whenever possible.
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- Insure the quality of your sleep. Try not to eat or drink alcohol within 2 hours before going to bed. Don’t workout before going to bed since exercise can make you feel energetic, which is not what you want if you’re trying to sleep. It’s best to limit caffeine to before lunch.

- Don’t use food to give you energy when lack of sleep is the problem. Often, people eat to help them stay awake, which doesn’t work and just adds extra calories.

Depression
If it’s more than feeling tired - accompanied by sadness, loss of appetite or lack of motivation, you may be suffering from some depressive symptoms. Contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) for a meeting to help assess what might be going on.

Stress
Sometimes stress can be a good thing. It can help motivate us to get a job done. However, stress shouldn’t be ongoing or overwhelming. At those times, stress can be exhausting. When the prospect of getting anything done seems so overwhelming that you can’t get anything done, then things have gotten out of control. Is it because you are the type to say “yes” to everything? You need to assess your priorities and learn to say “no.” This will help decrease your stress considerably. Saying “no” does not mean that you don’t care or that you are letting someone down. It simply means that you don’t have the time right now. It’s important to respect your own limits and take care of yourself. This can be energizing in and of itself.

Inadequate Time For Recovering From injury
One mistake that many people can make, is trying to get into a normal routine too quickly after recovering from surgery, illness or injury. The body takes time to heal, so don’t be too quick to rush back. This can increase the feelings of fatigue and make the recovery process longer.