

Exercise and fatigue

Fatigue - the overwhelming feeling of exhaustion unrelated to physical activity - is a very common feature of MS. It is essential to remember that fatigue is an integral part of MS, a real and recognised symptom, not something for which you should have to apologise.

It is important to acknowledge, both when exercising and in daily life, that it is not a good idea to 'work through' fatigue - you may end up feeling worse, often for days afterwards.

However, exercise can help combat fatigue. Muscles that are not used regularly become weakened and require more energy to carry out tasks. This can lead to a cycle of decline, as an already weak muscle that is not used will become weakened further, a process known as atrophy. Regardless of whether you have MS or not, a lack of activity will make any activity more tiring.

For many years people with MS were advised to avoid exercise due to the impact it could have on weakness and fatigue. It is now felt that exercise is beneficial if it works on building up endurance and strength in muscles without increasing fatigue and that it is important to try to remain as fit and active as possible.

Temperature can also affect fatigue. Everyone can feel drained of energy in hot or humid weather, but with MS the effect is often exaggerated. If heat is a problem, try using a fan or a cold water spray when exercising or having a cool bath before you start.