

# Controlling your IBD

## Fatigue

### Top Tips

- Always discuss your fatigue with your healthcare practitioner, especially if your fatigue is really getting you down
- Physical exercise may be beneficial to you, and there are many different types of exercise to choose from
- Set yourself achievable goals
- Consider lifestyle modification(s) where appropriate
- In some people with IBD, fatigue may be a sign that a flare is about to happen, so learn to read your fatigue symptoms to better manage your condition

Fatigue is one of the most troublesome symptoms of IBD. It greatly limits work and social activities and often prevents you from completing even basic everyday routines. It is also a major contributing factor towards low mood in people with IBD. In some people, abnormal fatigue may also be a symptom of a flare coming, so can be used as a warning sign of an imminent flare-up.

### What is fatigue?

To assess your level of fatigue and how it is interfering with your life, one can use a self-assessment questionnaire called the 'Brief Fatigue Inventory' (BFI). To download a printable PDF version of the BFI, [click here](#).

### How to use the BFI for self-assessment of fatigue

The BFI measures the severity of fatigue and interference caused by fatigue using scales of 0–10. In addition, the level of fatigue assessed by the BFI can be divided into categories of 'mild' (1–4), 'moderate' (5–6), and 'severe' (7–10) fatigue based on the amount of fatigue-related interference with function. This is a standard scale used in a number of diseases where fatigue is a co-morbidity.

**Reasons for fatigue:** fatigue stems from a variety of causes and treating each in turn can often make a big difference to your quality of life. For example, fatigue associated with IBD can be due to: pain; anaemia (a condition in which the red blood cell count, or haemoglobin level, is less than normal, leading to tiredness); side-effects of medicines; changes in mood; unhappiness or as a consequence of active disease (e.g. a flare).

### Managing your fatigue

Always discuss your fatigue with your healthcare practitioner (see [Your IBD Consultation/ Purpose of consultation](#)).

There are several simple strategies that you may find helpful in dealing with your fatigue:

- Gentle physical exercise (see [Achieve more with IBD/ Physical activity](#)) which is tailored to your current health state and preference, e.g. walking, swimming, cycling.
- If you suspect that you may have depression, discuss this with your healthcare practitioner, who can assess you, and advise you of the best treatment.
- Always try to set achievable goals. Don't take on too much!

Consider also lifestyle modifications:

- Although you may want to reduce your activity levels when you feel tired, it is important to slowly but gradually increase your activity; this 'pacing' of activity will allow you to feel you have more energy over time
- Varying your working hours (for example changing shifts, or asking for flexible working hours)
- Planning your day so that you minimise the effects of fatigue by getting periods of rest where you can
- Avoid situations which may aggravate your fatigue wherever possible
- If you have younger children to look after, ensure that you get help to do this when needed