

# ENERGY CONSERVATION



POLIO  
SERVICES  
VICTORIA

A Polio Services Victoria Production

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## How Do I Cope With Fatigue?

Once you have an understanding of your fatigue you can start to address it with energy conservation techniques

Fatigue or an intense sense of weariness is a common symptom experienced by people who have had polio. This often impacts on their ability to complete all the different tasks that they need to do in order to carry out the kind of lifestyle that they have grown accustomed to. The challenge for the person who suffers from fatigue is how to manage it.

It is essential to rule out any underlying medical cause for the fatigue eg.

sleep disorders, side effects of medication, depression or pain etc. Once you have established that your fatigue is due to the effects of polio you are then in a position to try and manage it. The following strategies have been found to be useful:

- Self education in relation to fatigue
- Role balance
- Energy conservation
- Work simplification

The study of fatigue in polio survivors at St Vincent's Hospital in

2001 indicated that 95% of participants in the study implemented a variety of coping strategies. The most commonly reported methods employed were:

- Napping
- Reducing activities
- Receiving help from others
- Using special equipment

The least implemented and least successful strategies were:

- A change of diet
- Exercise
- Medication

## Energy Conservation Techniques

Energy conservation and work simplification techniques are used widely. Although they can be restrictive, most people find them helpful in managing fatigue. To be able to conserve your energy you need to be able to understand and predict your fatigue levels. See "Map Your Fatigue". Once you have done this you can implement some simple techniques.

**1.** Be aware of the duration of fatigue and the time of day that it occurs. Where possible it is advisable to **structure the day** so that rests/napping can occur during periods of fatigue.

**2.** **Plan** the day around **rest breaks**, so there is adequate time to recover following activity. Ensure enough time for the completion of tasks so you don't have to be rushed which will exacerbate a sense of fatigue.

**3.** Before you begin an activity you should think about how important it is that you complete it. **Prioritise** to do those activities that are most important to you.

**4. Delegate** tasks to someone else wherever possible (role balance) to save your energy for things you need and want to do.

**5.** When energy is available, **self pace tasks** to conserve it. Try not to rush through tasks "in case the energy levels run out". As stated before, this will exacerbate any sense of fatigue you may have.

**6. Respect any signs of fatigue** that you may experience (muscle soreness, weakness, tiredness, reduced quality of movement, jaw clenching, facial grimacing.....) and ensure that you stop an activity if it is causing your symptoms.

### Map Your Fatigue

To be able to understand and predict your fatigue better you can try and map its behavior. This can be done by **keeping a diary**, using **rating scales** to score your fatigue (contact PSV for more information if you are interested) or keep a **record** of the **activity** that you can do at one time.

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## St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne

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### Multidisciplinary Team:

Rehabilitation Medicine  
Specialist  
Physiotherapist  
Orthotist  
Occupational Therapist

**Clinics:**  
Specialist Assessment  
Treatment Planning

Metropolitan  
Regional

## How Can I Modify Tasks?.....Some examples

### Household Tasks

Be aware of those times of day when there is energy. Plan to do demanding tasks during that time. Pace your activity and ensure you have adequate rests eg vacuum the house one room at a time, possibly over a couple of days. Make sure the tasks are done in a supported posture where possible. eg. sitting to do the ironing. Use adaptive equipment where needed eg long handled gardening tools for weeding, or a kitchen trolley to transport food. Do only those jobs that are important. Find alternative ways of completing other tasks. Delegate jobs to family members, order groceries over the telephone and have them home delivered, get council help, or pay to have someone clean your home.

### Mobility

If walking is becoming increasingly difficult, consider the use of a mobility

aid. If one is already in use you may have to consider a more supportive device for long or frequent journeys. Make sure that you use a disabled parking sticker to reduce the distances that you have to walk. When planning a trip out perhaps do it during a quieter period of the day. This will reduce the crowds, the amount of time spent standing in queues, and increase the availability of benches for resting.

### Work

At work, consider altering your start and finish times to accommodate fatigue levels at specific periods in the day eg. you could work in the evenings if you experience fatigue in the mornings. Arrange to be home from work on 1-2 days per week to save the energy of having to wake early and make your way into the office.

Ensure that your workstation is set up ergonomically as a poor posture and work practices can exacerbate fatigue.

## Conclusion

This brochure outlines only a few examples of ways of conserving energy to enable you to do those tasks that you need or want to do. You may actually feel that you need some help in managing your fatigue in which case you may seek help from:

1. **Your Doctor:** to have any new or unexplained changes to your fatigue assessed.
2. **An Occupational Therapist:** to assist in individualized advice about managing fatigue in relation to home and work based activities.
3. **A Physiotherapist:** to get advice concerning exercise, posture and mobility aids.

Feel free to contact PSV for help arranging an appointment at St Vincent's or somewhere locally to help you establish a fatigue management plan.

Remember, don't expect the impossible. Even with a good plan you may still have a sense of fatigue. There may be some things that you can't change. There may be things you can, but coping with the change itself is very difficult. By thinking laterally and being creative in the way you use your available energy some things will improve. By using energy conservation techniques you should be able to improve the quality of your life, although things may have to be done a little differently.