



Be Pain Smart – Fatigue

How to recharge

Fatigue is very common after a brain injury because your brain can find it hard to control alertness and attention. Being in chronic pain can be draining and make it harder to do everyday tasks. The good news is that you can slowly build up your energy levels and recharge your system.

Many of the tools you use to manage chronic pain also help with fatigue, such as pacing your activities, managing flare-ups, sleeping better, working on your unhelpful thoughts, keeping active and improving your mood.

Using these tools can feel overwhelming, but you can manage your pain and fatigue by being patient and persistent, tackling one 'brick' at a time.

Start by thinking about what things might set off your fatigue.

What are the triggers for your fatigue?

Doing too much – especially if I walk for too long.

Concentrating or reading for too long.

Comfort eating – I have sugary foods and caffeine drinks to boost my energy.

Staying up late playing video games.

Driving for too long.



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Also think about what are the signs that you are feeling fatigued.

What are your signs of fatigue?

I cannot pay attention.

My eyes start to get heavy.

It is harder to move, and my arms and legs feel like lead.

Sometimes if I sit still for a few minutes, I will doze off.

I cannot be bothered to do anything and stop doing the things I have planned.

USE THESE TOP RECHARGE TIPS TO HELP YOU MAKE A RECHARGE PLAN

Find a balance between rest and activity

It is a balancing act to get enough regular rest but not too much. It is important to allow your body to rest, but too much rest can reduce fitness, strength and movement – this will only make pain and fatigue worse. When planning your day, make sure you have a balance of rest and activity – use the '[Boom and bust cycle](#)' and '[Doing more](#)' tools to help you. Be patient – this will take time.

Shift your activity

Taking a rest break is not just about lying down or doing nothing, but also shifting your activity at set times to do something else. For example, when you are going for a walk, shift your activity by sitting on the bench at the park and calling a friend. Or after 20 minutes working on the computer, you can shift your activity to cleaning your kitchen for 10 minutes. Remember, having a rest from your activity does not mean that you stop all activity.

Pacing

Pacing is not just about managing your pain; you can pace your activities to manage your energy levels too. Check out the 'Pacing' tool [here](#). Remember, stick to your pacing plan and build bit-by-bit, so that your pain or fatigue levels are not in control of what you do or not do.



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Track your fatigue levels with an activity diary

It is hard to know if you are on track if you are not checking to see if your activity levels are helping your pain and fatigue. Use an activity diary like the one in the [‘Doing more’](#) tool to help you stay on track and manage your fatigue.

Check your medication

Some medication impacts on your alertness and can make you feel sleepy or drowsy. If you think this is the case, talk with your doctor about the role of these medications and if there is another option with less side-effects.

Get more sleep

Sleep is the best way to recharge. Go to the [sleep](#) brick to find out how to sleep better.

Let people know how you feel

Talk to others about your pain and fatigue – if you are open and honest, most people are understanding. Focus on telling them how the pain and fatigue changes what you can do, rather than how bad the pain or fatigue is. Tell others your limits and the tools you are using to manage and slowly, you will see progress. Learning to share in this way can feel and uncomfortable and it can take a few goes to get it right – but keep trying.

Reset your mind

Relaxation and meditation can help to calm the mind and energise parts of your brain. Think of these tools as an active form of rest. Meditating regularly can reduce your stress and anxiety levels, which uses up lots of your energy. Learning to relax helps the brain to send out chemicals which calm and energise the brain. Check out the [‘Meditation’](#) tools to help you make this a daily practice.

Get into nature

Being outdoors and spending time in nature can boost your energy levels. You only need to start with 20-30 minutes every day. You could go for a short walk, garden, or enjoy other outdoor activities. Make sure you get some sunlight too – vitamin D helps you to sleep better and can boost your mood.

Be creative

Find a way to express yourself creatively. Not only is this fun, but it energises your brain and helps to reduce your stress. A common way to do this is through art by painting or drawing, but you can be creative in different ways, including colouring in, DIY projects, writing or journaling, singing and photography.



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Nourish your body

Your energy levels are greatly impacted by your diet. Check out the tools on '[Lifestyle and nutrition](#)' to learn ways to give your body the right fuel it needs.

Have fun

When you have a brain injury and live with chronic pain it can be hard to have fun and it can seem impossible, but enjoying life and doing fun activities helps manage your fatigue. Having fun creates new pathways in your brain to build your energy and dial down your pain. Look at the tools in the '[Getting back into leisure](#)' section to get tips and ideas.

Put your devices down

Smartphones and tablets can be helpful, but can also drain your energy and mood. The blue light from the screen can tire your brain. You might find comparing your life to the 'picture perfect' life others have on social media can make you feel down, making your pain and fatigue worse. No-one's life is as perfect as it looks – take a break from social media to focus on creating a life that makes you happy and energises you.

Get more active

Surprisingly, you need to use energy to create more energy. Look at the '[Physical activity](#)' brick to help you become more active and build up your energy levels.

Notice and manage your thoughts

The way you think about your fatigue can play a big role in how you can manage your fatigue and pain. Use the '[Pain and fatigue thought swaps](#)' to boost your energy.



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My plan to recharge

Now it is time to put all this together and make your plan to recharge.

Select five things you can do to recharge

1. *Sit outside in the sun for 15 minutes each morning.*

2. *I am going to try getting up at the same time every morning and going to bed early.*

3. *I will sit down with my partner and make a pacing plan to help me to walk for longer.*

4. *I will plan to do some fun activities with the kids and make sure I have enough rest breaks.*

5. *I will make a healthy eating plan – I need to eat regular healthy meals and cut down on the sugary foods and caffeine drink.*



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What are the triggers for my fatigue?



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Also think about what are the signs that you are feeling fatigued.

What are your signs of fatigue?

Select five things you can do to recharge

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.