

Fatigue and Burnout

In dealing with this influenza pandemic, have your days started to feel like a marathon? You have more responsibilities and tasks; your family and friends need you. You are working long hours and facing unusual challenges. You may feel stressed, worried about facing disease, powerless, split between the desire to help and irritation or anger. It's not surprising you're feeling fatigued!

What Is Fatigue?

Fatigue is a normal human reaction to any major or prolonged physical or emotional effort. Fatigue is an alarm signal from your body that your energy reserves are dwindling and you need rest. It's important to listen to your body since its ability to face new situations and adapt to them has its limits; if you keep on going, all you'll get is exhausted. You may have many demands on you as a parent, a partner, a worker, a friend, or a caregiver, but to keep your equilibrium and your health, you must stay vigilant for signs of fatigue and take steps to avoid burnout. Remember: nobody can control this influenza pandemic, but you can take steps for yourself, to care for your health and well-being and support your loved ones as you go through this difficult time together.



Signs of Fatigue

Thoughts: distraction, forgetfulness, mistrust, difficulty making decisions...

- "I'm having trouble making decisions. I keep second-guessing myself, even for little things."
- "I'm so spaced out. Today I forgot to stop at the sign and I got a ticket. Yesterday I nearly ran a red light."
- "My friends keep telling me I need to rest. But what I need isn't important; it's my family that matters."
- "It bothers me to need help. I don't want anyone else taking care of my sick son."

Behaviour: arguments, aggression, mood swings, isolation, passiveness, alcohol or drug abuse, frustration...

- "I feel like I spend the whole day running around and yelling at people."
- "My parents keep calling me to ask for my help. They know I'm up to here with work; it's like they're doing it on purpose. Today I finally lost it with them."
- "I don't know what's the matter with me. I keep bursting out crying, or laughing at nothing. I'm a bundle of nerves."
- "I've been drinking when I'm stressed out. I didn't use to do that."
- "I slammed my closet door today. My kid was scared of me."

Emotions: irritability, anxiety, anger, stress, guilt, bad self esteem, denial of your signs of fatigue...

- "I can't handle all this. I'm not a doctor! I really don't know what I'm supposed to do; I don't know how to care for her!"
- "I don't matter to anyone. Nobody's offered any help. I feel rejected."
- "I feel boxed in – I want to get away. Before the pandemic hit, I used to go out and have friends over. Now I don't have a minute to myself."
- "I'm really angry and disappointed. I had to postpone the trip I really wanted to go on."
- "People are just being dramatic. I'm not tired. I can handle it."
- "I feel so guilty. I'm spending all my time taking care of my parents, and my family's paying the price: the kids are bored and my partner is touchy."

- "I'm scared my kids will get sick. I can't stop thinking about it, I can't stop worrying."
- "I'm not as lively as I usually am. I can't laugh at jokes anymore."

Physical state: tiredness, nervousness, headaches or backaches, muscle tension, sleep problems, appetite problems...

- "I didn't sleep well again last night. I have a headache and I'm all tense. I'm not bouncing back like I used to."
- "I'm nervous. I jump out of my skin whenever I hear a noise."
- "I sometimes feel dizzy and my vision gets blurry when I'm in the middle of something."

Reassure yourself – all these emotions and feelings are possible and normal in prolonged periods of stress and disrupted life habits. But be careful, because your energy reserves are not unlimited.

If your reserves are dwindling and you need to replenish them to face the situation at hand, or if you're worried that one of your loved ones is wearing out, there is no magic formula, but there are some little things you can do in your everyday life.

Everyone has the right to feel fatigued, to be imperfect, to make mistakes, or to get angry or impatient from time to time. Nobody can do the impossible.

Don't Wait Until You Burn Out – Take Steps to Improve the Situation

Get Informed

- Get reliable information on influenza, hygiene measures to follow, and how to care for your loved ones if needed. A lack of information inevitably leads to rumours and misinterpretations.
- Consult the Government of Québec pandemic website:
www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca
- Get information on the support services available in your community.
- Get information on support services available in your workplace, if applicable.



Get Organized

- Make a written list of your priorities: what has to get done, what you have time to do, what can wait, and time for unforeseen situations. Do only one thing at a time.
- Set realistic, attainable goals.
- Lower your expectations of yourself. Accept that you can't do everything and that nobody's perfect.
- Share responsibilities and tasks with your family. Make a list with a schedule for each one.
- Identify someone you can count on to give you a break if necessary. Make sure you can count on them.
- Create and maintain bonds of solidarity with your family, friends, and colleagues. You can exchange prevention tips and ways to reduce the workload, and warn one another if you feel near burnout.
- Don't hesitate to ask for or accept help. It's not a matter of pride or weakness on your part, but of taking responsibility for your own health.
- Remember strategies you've used in the past to get through difficult times.
- Count on your personal strengths and resources.



Take Care of Yourself

- Ask someone to help you by taking care of some things so that you can get a good night's sleep.
- Relax by doing something you like or by just doing nothing. What do you usually do to relax?
- Every day, take time to take care of your health. For example, do a physical activity, enjoy simple pleasures like reading, or have a 20-minute nap.
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle, with a proper diet and a regular sleep schedule; avoid caffeine in the evening.

- Learn to respect your limits and say no, even if you feel guilty about it.
- Do relaxation exercises.
- Be alert for signs of fatigue and burnout.
- Give yourself permission to express what you feel, for example by talking to someone you trust, drawing, or writing.



Things Are Getting Better When...

Thoughts

- You are less hesitant before making decisions.
- You don't second-guess your decisions as much after you make them.
- You can concentrate on reading the paper or a magazine.

Behaviour

- Your behaviour is calmer.
- You have fewer moments of impatience.
- You're consuming alcohol more moderately.

Emotions

- You feel calmer.
- You enjoy talking to friends on the phone.
- You're more able to do one thing at a time.
- You find yourself laughing like you used to.

Physical State

- You are slowly recovering. You've had a few good nights' sleep.
- Your headaches and muscle tensions are less intense and don't last as long.
- You feel less nervous and are more able to relax.

When to Seek Help

As much as you want to take care of yourself, your symptoms of fatigue may persist and get more intense, and you may feel unable to function in your daily life and overwhelmed by the situation. For example:

- You are bursting into tears for no reason.
- You can no longer bounce back; you always feel like you're running on empty.
- You can't concentrate or make decisions, even minor ones.
- You are irritable and have frequent outbursts of anger.
- You are sleeping very badly. You often need a drink to calm down and help you sleep.
- You feel like you don't have enough energy to enjoy yourself.

Careful!

You've used up your energy reserves and are running on "adrenaline." This is dangerous for your health and that of the people you're caring for. You need help, support, and rest. It's time to consult a professional. There are many resources available to help you.

Available Resources

Telephone

- Your local health and social services centre
- Info-Santé: 8-1-1
- Services Québec toll-free line: 1-877-644-4545
- Tel-jeunes: 1-800-263-2266
- Ligne Parents: 1-800-361-5085
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter: 514-849-3291

Internet

- Government of Québec pandemic website: www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca
- Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter: www.acsm-ca.qc.ca/questionnaires
- Tel-jeunes: www.teljeunes.com

Read the other psychosocial information sheets dealing with various topics related to influenza pandemics. They can be downloaded from the Government of Québec's pandemic website.

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Checklist

If necessary, contact:
