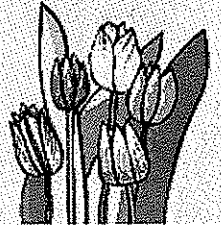


TO YOUR HEALTH



Volume 14, Number 4

April 2009

SLOWLY RECOVERING FROM WINTER

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

Just as the earliest flowers shake off the last traces of snow, our bodies and spirits slowly respond to increased light and gentle, warmer breezes. It has been a long, hard winter. Many have coped with physical illnesses, falls and surgeries, not to mention the emotional turmoil that often accompanies them. Recuperation, like the beginnings of spring, is a slow process with many ups and downs, characterized by a few "good days" and followed by several days of back sliding.

Fatigue is a common occurrence after an illness or surgery or an injurious fall. Yet many people find themselves wondering if their fatigue is normal or if they are truly recovering. Could something else be wrong? Fatigue is difficult to define. Some authorities have suggested that there are two kinds of fatigue: physical fatigue and cognitive fatigue.

Physical fatigue often is described as physical "tiredness," feeling the need to sit down or of not being able to get the day started. Cognitive fatigue may occur during sustained periods of mental effort. It is known that older people use more of their brains than do younger people who are working on the same task. This increased brain activity may contribute to cognitive fatigue and may explain why solving problems becomes more difficult after sustained efforts, (*Unexplained Fatigue in the Elderly*, NIA Conference, June 2007).

While sometimes fatigue can result from illnesses, anemia or winter depression, most often fatigue is caused by several factors, not just one. There are emotional, behav-

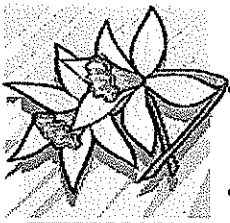
ioral, social and cultural influences that contribute to the development of fatigue. For example, one is commonly puzzled by the seemingly long recovery that takes place after a respiratory illness or even a cold. There is clearly the physical component of recuperation. But if a person worries that his or her recovery is too extended, the worry and anxiety actually create an added burden, lengthening the recovery. Some believe that an older person cannot recover after a serious illness or injury, and this negative belief can have an adverse psychological effect on the person. How we feel and what we think about our recovery can influence the recovery.

Fear, worry and depression may be hidden under "fatigue." They may underlie the fatigue. Sometimes the weight of these emotions feels heavy and is experienced as physical tiredness and fatigue. Or the combination of physical fatigue with emotional or cognitive fatigue blends to create a deep sense of fatigue, deeper than either alone.

To overcome fatigue, the first principle is to accept that fatigue accompanies all illnesses, injuries and surgeries as a natural process that is needed for the body to heal and recuperate. What feels like fatigue is the body slowly restoring itself, slowly regaining its balance. An amazing quality of our body is its natural ability to seek balance and health.

To support this natural tendency, we can take several actions to promote recuperation and return to health:

- Minimize stress
- Wake up naturally, without an alarm
- Avoid beginning the day with the news

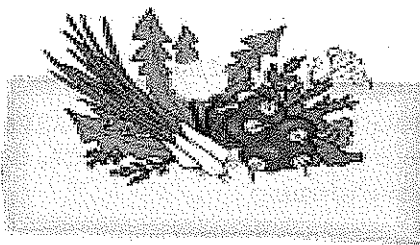


- As the weather warms, begin the day in sunshine with a brief walk outside
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of vegetables and fruits; avoid concentrated sugars and processed foods
- Take vitamin supplements
- Take a 30 – 60 minute *siesta* in the afternoon when the energy levels naturally dip (People who take a 30-minute nap at least three times/week reduce their risk of death by heart disease by 37% over a six-year period, *Self Healing*, October 2008.)
- Provide yourself with a daily, brief period of meditation, prayer or spiritual reading
- Set your intention for the day: select a word that describes a quality you would like to be for the day such as peaceful, slow or joyful.
- Gradually increase your exercise, especially walking
- And most importantly, be patient with your recovery and accept that healing is a slow, imperfect journey

has been stored underground or in the trunks of trees is rising up, ready to leaf out, to reach for the sun. The energy of the season supports us to be busy, come out of our houses, and emerge from our winter cocoons.

In Chinese medicine, spring is the time of the Wood Element. This is a time of new beginnings and growth. The Wood Element governs the liver and gall bladder. The liver and gall bladder are involved with digestion and processing the many substances we take into our bodies.

Spring is the time of year to strengthen the Wood energy. Get exercise regularly. Exercise helps to detoxify the liver. Eat lighter meals now that the weather is warming up. Fresh young seasonal vegetables, sprouts, onions, leeks, garlic and dandelion greens are all good foods to add to your diet in the spring. Enjoy the green that is opening around and let yourself feel the hope and promise of this season.



*Through the weeks of deep snow
 We walked above the ground
 On fallen sky, as though we did
 Not come of root and leaf, as though
 We had only air and weather
 For our difficult home.
 But now
 As March warms, and the rivulets
 Run like birdsong on the slopes,
 And the branches of light sing in the hills,
 Slowly we return to earth.*

Wendell Berry

HAPPY SPRING

by Margaret Ryding, Acupuncturist
 Carleton-Willard Village Clinic

Spring has come to New England. Finally, the amazing piles of snow we had this winter are gone and green shoots are pushing up through the dirt. Buds are swelling on the trees. Tulips and Narcissus have emerged. Crocus and Pussy Willows are blooming. Cardinals are singing joyously in the early morning light. In the creative cycle of life, spring is new birth. Baby animals are born. This is an amazing and busy time in nature. All the energy that

COMING ATTRACTION

On Wednesday, April 15, Derek Logan, Physical Therapist and Director of Rehabilitation Services at CWV, will give a health education presentation on "The Aging Shoulder: Rotator Cuff Syndrome — Are You the One in Five?" Join us at 10:30 AM in Auditorium Center