

TO YOUR HEALTH



Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

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FATIGUE: WILL IT EVER END?

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

As winter finally drops its last snowflake, many people are left recovering from illnesses and colds as well as the “seasonal blues.” March went out with a bang leaving many still struggling with fatigue and lack of energy. This always raises the question of what is normal to expect and what is not. When is fatigue more serious than the usual tiredness that accompanies the resolution of illnesses?

Fatigue is one of those symptoms that can be caused by numerous medical and emotional conditions, medicines and even lifestyle factors (www.mayoclinic.org). For those recuperating from influenza and similar respiratory infections, even colds, the recovery can be slow and prolonged. This often is the nature of recuperation from any condition that has caused fever and extended illness. When one is really sick for a week or more, not moving around much, and not feeling like eating, the time it takes to return to normal is much longer than usual.

Inactivity, in and of itself, contributes to fatigue just as do lack of sleep and unhealthy eating. Medicines to treat respiratory infections like cough medicine and some antibiotics can play an additive role in causing fatigue. When underlying

medical conditions are exacerbated by acute illnesses, the recovery time can be greater than if only an acute illness had occurred. For example, those with chronic lung conditions, kidney disease, heart disorders or cancer may have prolonged recuperation time when they experience an acute illness.

Anemia is a well-known cause of fatigue. It occurs when there is not enough hemoglobin in the blood. Hemoglobin is the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen throughout the body. Its risk increases with age and can accompany chronic conditions such as kidney disease, cancer and rheumatoid arthritis; it is referred to as an Anemia of Chronic Disease. Iron-deficiency anemia results from a decreased ability to absorb nutrients from food, malnutrition and low-level gastro-intestinal bleeding. Pernicious anemia is a deficiency in vitamin B12, needed for red blood cell production (John Hopkins Medical Letter, *Health After 50*, November 2013).

Anemia, low hemoglobin levels, is not an illness but a symptom of illness, and a series of blood test can help to diagnose the cause. Many people consult with blood specialists and can receive special treatments to boost the body’s ability to make red blood cells. Only in the case of iron-deficiency anemia is iron



supplementation useful. As with other chronic illnesses, anemia can lengthen the recovery time from an acute illness. Likewise, an acute illness on top of anemia can potentially worsen the anemia, increasing fatigue.

Like medical conditions, emotional conditions can cause fatigue. Depression often is characterized by fatigue and lack of motivation. Stress and anxiety can be exhausting. Add any of these to an acute illness, and recovery time will be prolonged.

However, there are many ways to effectively cope with fatigue. The most important may be to recognize that recuperation is always a slower process than we expect. There is no quick way to recover from an acute illness especially in the context of underlying chronic conditions or advanced age. It simply takes time.

Pacing activity as recovery begins is an important strategy. Returning to exercise is not recommended as the body needs all of its energy to heal. Gradually increasing walking and other activities by alternating rest with activity is the best approach. Drinking adequate fluids, eating a healthy diet, getting extra sleep, avoiding caffeine and alcohol can promote recuperation. Staying away from other sick people and large crowds may mean staying at home longer than you would prefer. It's better not to risk another illness! Spring, warm weather and renewed energy are on their way!

CLINIC NEWS

We are sorry to announce that Margaret Ryding, Acupuncturist, is no longer accepting new patients at Carleton-Willard. She is moving her practice to Western Mass. We have appreciated her services and wish her the very best.

INFLUENZA REMINDER

Please remember that influenza is very contagious. If you develop a fever, cough, achiness and runny nose, please call the Clinic. It is important to stay in for 7 days after beginning symptoms. Treatment with an antiviral medicine, if started within 48 hours, can reduce the severity and length of symptoms. Please call the Clinic with any questions.

HEALTH EDUCATION LECTURE

April 30, 2014

10:30 am —11:30 am

Center Auditorium

On April 30, Judy Curless, PT, will discuss "For Women Only: Bladder Control & Pelvic Health." Join us at 10:30 am to learn about ways to help leaky bladders, incontinence, pelvic pain and constipation.