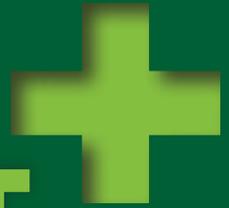




THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT LEARN & ADVISE



MODULE 14: JUNE 2016

Tiredness & fatigue

Everyone feels tired from time to time and a good night's sleep usually sorts it out. But when tiredness becomes more problematic, people may turn to the pharmacy for help.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, assistants will:

- Understand what causes tiredness and who is more likely to suffer from it
- Know when to refer to the pharmacist
- Know the treatment and self-help options available.

There is no hard and fast medical definition of tiredness, but most people would agree that it is characterised by a decrease in or absence of energy, as well as physical and mental exhaustion. It is important to remember that perceptions and experiences of fatigue are subjective. In other words, what one person considers exhaustion may well be what someone else regards as part of everyday life.

There are some groups of people who seem more likely to experience fatigue than others, such as women and people with long-term physical and mental health conditions. No age group is exempt, although fatigue appears to be less common among the very young and the very old.

The prognosis for fatigue is positive and many people who seek medical advice as a result of fatigue do not require any follow-up care. A good recovery is especially likely in those whose fatigue is of short duration or low severity. People who have no carer responsibilities, good social support, are not in pain and have good mental health are also more likely to get better without any problems. Men also tend to recover more quickly and more completely than women.

On the flip side, the complications of energy levels not being restored include a negative impact on relationships, friendships and work, as well as an increased risk of serious conditions, including obesity, heart disease and diabetes.



This module is suitable for all members of the pharmacy team who wish to increase their knowledge of common conditions, treatment options and communication skills. This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by pharmacy teams as part of their ongoing learning. This module can also form part of your Team Tuesday training.



DID YOU KNOW?

Feeling exhausted is so common that it has its own acronym – TATT, which stands for 'tired all the time'.

Understanding the problem

The Royal College of Psychiatrists states that at any given time, one in every five people feel unusually tired and one in 10 have prolonged fatigue.

In order to understand the problem, it can be helpful to be aware of the possible reasons why someone may feel this way. These fall into three main categories:

1

Physical causes include conditions often associated with tiredness such as pregnancy, glandular fever, anaemia, cancer and an underactive thyroid. But there are some less obvious but nonetheless common culprits, such as diabetes, autoimmune disorders and liver, heart and respiratory illnesses. Painful conditions like arthritis can also be very tiring, as can being significantly under- or overweight.

2

Psychological causes include depression, insomnia, anxiety and stress – whether this is negative (e.g. work or relationship issues or bereavement) or positive (e.g. getting married or moving house). It is worth noting that, contrary to popular opinion, tiredness with a psychological cause is much more common than tiredness caused by a physical problem.

3

Lifestyle causes can include drinking too much alcohol (particularly in the evening), suffering from disturbed sleep (most commonly because of caring for young children, shift work or sleeping during the day), too high a caffeine intake (six cups of coffee or 10 cups of tea a day can have an adverse effect), exercising excessively and not getting enough sleep.

When to refer

Certain symptoms should ring warning bells, so get your pharmacist involved if a customer reports any of the following alongside tiredness:

- Significant and unintentional weight loss
- Signs that could indicate a neurological problem (e.g. loss of vision or coordination)
- Symptoms of malignancy (e.g. a lump, rectal or postmenopausal vaginal bleeding, difficulty swallowing or vomiting blood) or an infection (e.g. night sweats or a fever)
- Suspected carbon monoxide poisoning (symptoms would include headache, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness and a raised heart rate)
- Anything that indicates an undiagnosed chronic condition (e.g. breathing difficulties suggests COPD, while tiredness that is worse in the morning hints at depression)
- Persistent or recurrent fatigue (although not lifelong) that might point towards chronic fatigue syndrome.

Tiredness can be a side effect of many medicines – from prescription drugs such as painkillers, sedatives and blood pressure medication to over-the-counter remedies for hayfever and herbal products – so ask your pharmacist to step in if someone is complaining of fatigue and tells you they are taking any medicines at all.





DID YOU KNOW?

A good way to maintain energy throughout the day is to eat regular meals and healthy snacks every three to four hours.

Managing tiredness

There are several steps that can be put in place to address factors that may be causing tiredness. These include:

- **Improving sleep** by sticking to regular times for going to bed and waking up; keeping the bedroom quiet and at a comfortable temperature; reducing daytime napping; avoiding eating and drinking late at night and relaxing before bed by taking a hot bath, listening to music, reading or using a relaxation technique
- **Taking regular exercise** can increase energy levels, but may be difficult to contemplate for those who are feeling tired. The key is to start with something small but regular, such as walking, then slowly increase the duration over weeks or months with the aim of improving fitness, strength and stamina
- **Reduce stress levels** by introducing relaxing pursuits such as yoga or spending time with friends
- **Stopping smoking and cutting back on alcohol and caffeine** as these can all affect sleep, which in turn impacts on energy levels the next day. Reducing these slowly may be easier than quitting abruptly and will help limit withdrawal symptoms
- **Eating a healthy diet**, with the aim of getting to and/or maintaining a healthy body mass index (BMI)
- **Planning activities** so that a frantically busy day does not result in being able to do nothing the next day because of exhaustion. A little every day is much more sensible
- **Managing expectations** so that they are realistic in terms of improving energy levels and maintaining them. It can be helpful for people to reflect on whether they were expecting too much of themselves and if they have struck a good balance between work and other obligations and rest and leisure activities.



Don't forget...

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), which is sometimes referred to as myalgic encephalopathy or encephalomyelitis (ME), is different to everyday tiredness. It causes persistent fatigue, which can result in severe impairments to daily functioning, and does not go away with sleep or rest.

OTC remedies

It's a rare person who wouldn't like a magic pill to cure tiredness, but such a product simply does not exist, despite the fact that there are lots that make such a claim.

- Vitamin supplements are popular, but apart from a few notable exceptions, such as folic acid in pregnancy and vitamin D supplements for various groups including those who don't get much sun exposure, most people can get all the nutrients they need from a healthy, balanced diet
- Energy drinks give a quick boost, thanks to their sugar and caffeine content, but the effect is temporary and can cause problems in the short term (e.g. irritability and restlessness) and in the long run (e.g. weight gain and raised blood pressure)
- Detox regimes, usually involving a strict diet of raw fruit and vegetables, often in juice form, have been debunked. After all, the kidneys are very effective and efficient at getting rid of what the body doesn't need, so a healthy, balanced diet is considered more sensible.



SIGNPOSTING

For more information, you can:

- Use your *Counter Intelligence Plus* training guide
- Visit NHS Choices: [nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/tiredness-and-fatigue.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/tiredness-and-fatigue.aspx)
- Look at information provided by the Royal College of Psychiatrists: [rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/tiredness.aspx](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/tiredness.aspx)
- Find out more about healthy eating at: [nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx)

TEST YOURSELF ONLINE

GOOD PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT WHEN ADVISING CUSTOMERS



Questions

1) Which of the following groups are more likely to experience tiredness as a symptom?

- a) Middle-aged men
- b) New mums
- c) Young children
- d) Nursing home residents

2) Which of the following statements is FALSE?

- a) Around one in five people feel unusually tired in any given year
- b) Chronic fatigue syndrome is sometimes called ME
- c) Having carer responsibilities is one of the factors that indicates a good recovery from tiredness
- d) One in 10 people have prolonged fatigue in any given year

3) Which of the following is not usually a reason for tiredness?

- a) Overactive thyroid
- b) Diabetes
- c) Anaemia
- d) Cancer

4) Which of the following is not usually a lifestyle cause of tiredness?

- a) Eating a healthy, balanced diet
- b) Exercising too much
- c) Napping during the day
- d) Drinking too many caffeine-containing drinks

5) Which of the following does not warrant referral to the pharmacist?

- a) Night sweats
- b) Tiredness that is worse in the morning
- c) Unexplained weight loss
- d) Not getting enough sleep because of shift work or young children

6) Which of the following can help to improve tiredness?

- a) Having regular naps during the day
- b) Taking regular (but not excessive) exercise
- c) Smoking just before going to bed
- d) A hot cup of tea with dinner

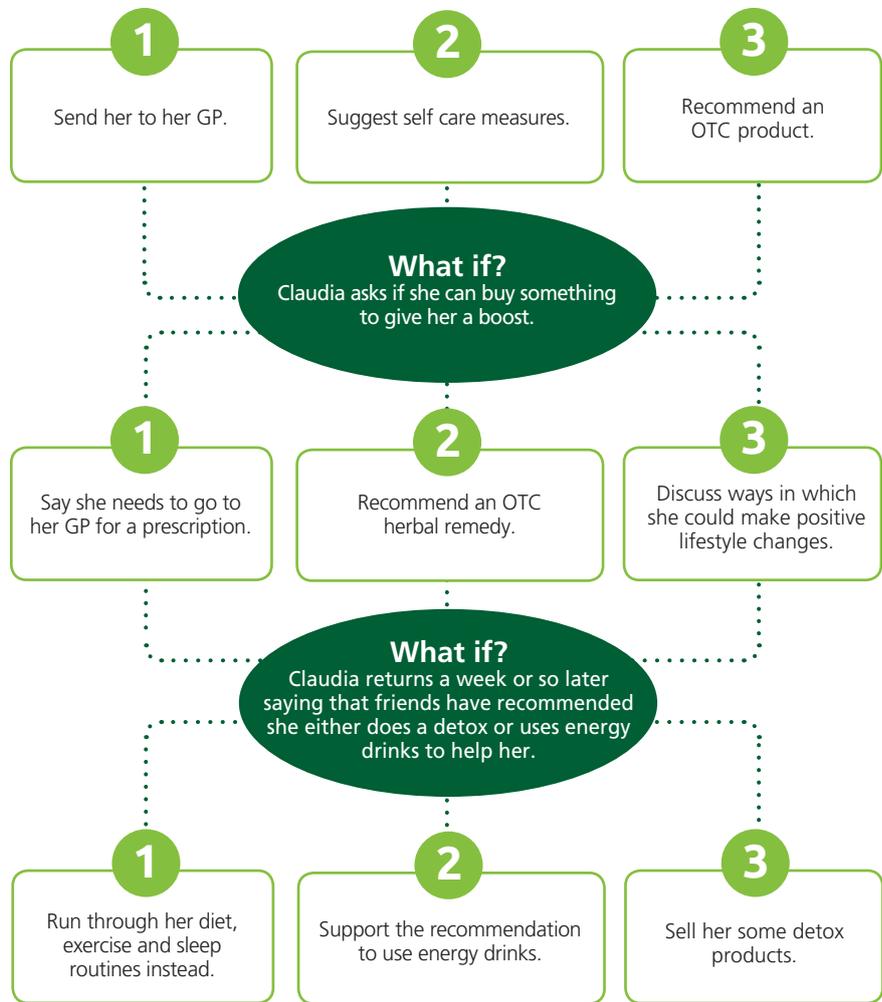


Scenario

Claudia is excited about the prospect of her wedding in a few weeks, but she confides in you that she has been feeling very tired. In fact, her tiredness has been having such an impact that she's now struggling to get through the day and is worried that she won't look her best on her big day.

What would you recommend?

For each part of this scenario, think about the decision you would make and, importantly, why you would choose that option. In addition, for each decision that you make, think about how you would talk to the customer and provide the necessary advice, and discuss this with your team and pharmacist.



Go to www.tmmagazine.co.uk to submit your answers to these questions. When you pass, you'll be able to download a certificate to showcase your learning. You can also add this to your online, personalised learning log.

www.tmmagazine.co.uk