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8 Surprising Reasons You're Tired

Discover unexpected causes of fatigue and what you can do about them

By Sarah Jio Posted January 14, 2011 from [WomansDay.com](#)

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Yawning? Again? When sleep deprivation isn't the reason, you might be surprised by what is: Everything from your diet to an untreated infection could be to blame. We talked to medical experts to come up with a list of surprising causes of fatigue as well as how to treat them.

Reason #1: An Undiagnosed Thyroid Problem

The source of your sleepiness could be a tiny organ near your throat that you may have never even thought about: your thyroid. According to recent estimates, 10 million Americans—and as many as 10 percent of women—have hypothyroidism, a condition that can lead to hair loss, weight gain and fatigue. “Fatigue arises from a lack of thyroid hormone in the body, resulting in a decline in overall metabolic rate,” says Pam Peeke, MD, author of *Body for Life for Women*. “Metabolism is like the body's battery. If you lack the thyroid hormone, your battery is slowly drained, and lack of energy is one of the first symptoms noted.”



What to do? If you're feeling fatigued, talk to your doctor about the possibility of a thyroid issue. “It is easily detected by a simple blood test that determines the level of thyroid hormone as well as its master hormone.” Treatment, usually daily replacement hormones, is inexpensive and noninvasive. *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #2: Undiagnosed Depression

The reason you're feeling a lack of energy may have more to do with your mood than your body. Depression is the number-one risk factor for sleepiness and fatigue, says [John Sharpe, MD](#), a Harvard psychiatrist and author of the new book *The Emotional Calendar*. And sometimes, he adds, this is how a depressive episode presents—with sudden drops in energy levels and an interest in sleeping more.



What to do? If you're experiencing persistent tiredness and little zest for life, talk to your doctor. She may want to refer you to a mental healthcare provider who can prescribe medication that boosts your mood and your energy levels.

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Reason #3: Undiagnosed Sleep Disorder

You go to bed at a reasonable hour in order to get your full 8 hours of sleep, so why do you wake up exhausted? The answer could be a sleep disorder like sleep apnea, say experts, which causes poor, disrupted sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep apnea affects as many as 20 percent of people who snore, and about 4 percent of women between the ages of 30 and 60. “Symptoms that should alert a woman include excessive daytime sleepiness, loud snoring, waking up in the morning feeling exhausted, having trouble with memory and concentration, morning or night headaches, episodes where you stop breathing, tossing and turning throughout the night, and nighttime choking or gasping.”



What to do? Talk to your doctor about being referred to a sleep specialist. “The diagnosis is made by an evaluation of sleep test results,” says Dr. Peeke. “A specialized mask that delivers oxygen during sleep is the traditional mode of therapy. Since a large number of people who have sleep apnea are obese, weight reduction is highly encouraged to alleviate if not reverse the condition.” *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #4: An Untreated Urinary Tract Infection

While pain, burning and irritability are the most common signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI), some people’s symptoms aren’t as obvious. In fact, some women only feel tiredness or fatigue when a UTI hits. “Sometimes a UTI will present in a subtle way,” explains Dr. Peeke. “Feeling tired and drained is common. This occurs because the woman is harboring an infection in her bladder, which creates a state of inflammation. This sets into motion a host of immune defenses, one of which results in the secretion of interleukins, white cells that can cause a feeling of fatigue.”



What to do? If you suspect a UTI, see your doctor. “The diagnosis is made by an examination of a urine sample, looking for bacteria and red blood cells,” she says. “The classic treatment is use of an antibiotic, encouragement to drink plenty of water to wash the infection through the bladder, and possibly a urethral anesthetizing medication to decrease the discomfort and frequency associated with urination.” *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #5: Your Diet

What you put in your mouth has a direct correlation to your energy level, say experts. Not only are sufficient calories and protein necessary for optimum energy, but nutrients, like iron, are also important. And if you’re not getting enough, you may be feeling fatigue. “Food is the fuel for our bodies, and without it they cannot function properly,” says Keri Gans, RD, a New York–based dietitian and author of *The Small Change Diet*, who notes that two of the most common causes of fatigue are not eating enough and not eating the right foods. “If you lack iron in your diet, your body won’t produce enough hemoglobin, a substance in red blood cells that enable them to carry oxygen to your cells,” she explains. “Too little iron and you could develop anemia, which can leave you feeling weak and tired.”



What to do? Make sure you’re eating three balanced meals a day, and two healthy snacks. And, to make sure you’re getting enough iron, eat plenty of dark green leafy vegetables, iron-fortified cereals, whole-grain breads and pasta, nuts and seeds, beans, eggs, poultry and seafood, suggests Gans. *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #6: Undiagnosed Food Allergy or Intolerance

Feeling sluggish? A growing number of health experts believe that fatigue may be a sign of an undiagnosed food allergy, such as the intolerance to wheat and gluten known as celiac disease. “Food intolerances can tax a woman's system because when the allergen is ingested, it can cause inflammation and a defensive reaction from her immune system,” notes Dr. Peeke. “Allergies can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, from skin rashes, gastrointestinal bloating and pain to nausea and fatigue.”



What to do? “If there is any concern about food allergies, a woman should consult her physician and work with her medical team to uncover the specific allergen,” she explains. “The testing is fairly precise and will require her to modify her dietary intake during the evaluation. Treatment entails avoidance of any food that triggers a reaction.” *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #7: Too Much Caffeine

You drink coffee to rev up your energy, not drag you down. But too much java can have the opposite effect, say experts. “A normal amount of coffee includes 200 to 300 milligrams of caffeine, or roughly 2 to 4 cups of brewed coffee per day,” says Dr. Peeke. “Once you're consuming 500 to 600 mg per day (5 to 7 cups), you can run into trouble.” Some overcaffeinated symptoms include insomnia, irritability, headaches, anxiety and fatigue.



What to do? Consider switching to tea, which contains less caffeine yet can still give you a boost in the morning or afternoon. And get moving, says Dr. Peeke. “Doing physical activity, especially if it's intense, can rev up a woman's norepinephrine (adrenaline) and energize her.” Also, when you need a boost, try having a glass of cold water—nature's gentle way of energizing your body! *Photo: Shutterstock*

Reason #8: Little to Look Forward To

Everyone deals with peaks and valleys in their lives, but if your life consists of more valleys than peaks right now, it could affect your motivation, happiness and even energy. “You might be tired and dispirited because you don't have anything to look forward to,” says **Caroline Miller**, MAPP, a life coach and the author of *Creating Your Best Life*. “Happy people tend to have a ‘savoring’ personality, which means that they often are anticipating pleasurable events, and their calendars are studded with parties, mini-trips, and outings with people who make them smile.”



What to do? If you don't have much happening on the horizon, consider doing some goal-setting. “The happiest among us always wake up to clear-cut, challenging goals, according to groundbreaking research published in 2008,” says Miller. “It's important that the goals take us out of our comfort zone, because efforts to accomplish those goals are what we tend to value most at the end of the day, and that elevates our self-esteem.” *Photo: Shutterstock*

Sarah Jio is the health and fitness blogger for Glamour.com. Visit her blog, [Vitamin G](#).

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