

# ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FATIGUE IN IBD

Fatigue is a frequently under recognised clinical problem in patients with IBD which results in an important decrease in quality of life and impaired work productivity and functioning. Unlike tiredness (which can happen to everyone on occasions) fatigue is a burdensome symptom that implies lack of energy or exhaustion out of proportion to physical exertion. Fatigue limits the daily activities and it is not relieved by rest.



## Fatigue in patients with IBD

nearly 50 % of patients in clinical remission



80% of those with active disease

## 1. WHAT CAUSES FATIGUE?

There are different factors that, together or separately, can be detrimental to our energy levels and if uncontrolled lead to fatigue:

### Disease activity -Inflammation

IBD causes inflammation in the digestive track. Our body is put under stress as it fights the inflammation and therefore makes you feel more fatigued.

### Anemia

Anemia is an important cause of fatigue. It happens when you have not enough blood cells to carry sufficient oxygen to your body's tissues. There are many forms of anemia, the most common cause of anemia is low levels of iron in the body. Iron deficiency anemia may be due to chronic gastrointestinal bleeding and decreased nutritional intake. Another form of anemia seen in chronic diseases can be due to malabsorption of vitamins and minerals, very common in people with IBD. Without iron, folate and vitamin B12 the body is not able to create more red blood cells resulting in weakness and fatigue.

### CAUSES OF ANEMIA



Common causes	Less common causes
Iron deficiency anemia Anemia of chronic disease	Folic acid deficiency B12 vitamin deficiency



### Micronutrients deficiency

People with IBD often experience loss of appetite, nausea or diarrhea. These factors lead directly to an insufficient intake of calories or to a poor absorption of nutrients to correctly fuel the body with energy. Additionally, dietary restrictions can lead to nutritional deficiencies. A gluten-free diet, for example, can be deficient in calcium, iron or niacin.

### Medication

Fatigue can be a direct medication-related adverse effect. Although less common, some medicines for IBD may cause fatigue such as corticosteroids, some immunomodulators, steroids or other drugs. Antidepressants or narcotics are also associated with lethargy and somnolence and therefore fatigue.

### Altered gut microbiome

IBD is associated with decreased gut microbiome diversity. That means a higher intestine wall permeability that allows crossing bacteria into our blood circulation which causes our immune system to react, resulting in inflammation. The more permeability, the more energy the body needs to spend in order to fight it.

## 2. 5 AREAS WHERE FATIGUE IMPACTS ON YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE

### Social activities

The ups and downs of the disease make it really difficult to plan any social activity and can have a huge impact on a person's social interaction. A study showed that 40 % were prevented from pursuing an intimate relationship and 29% were prevented from making or keeping friends due to their IBD.

40%



29%



### Physical activities

Fatigue makes it very difficult to take part in any physical activity, be it playing sports or going to the supermarket.



### Relationships

The disease activity marks the relationships with your closest. Some of them will be more understanding than others in relation with the disease. In time of fatigue when you require more special attention and needs, family and friends will become your best support and caregivers.

### Work and education

Fatigue affects employment and education, even when the disease is in remission. Fatigue influences negatively your productivity level and can lead to higher unemployment and work disability rates in the case of employment. Students feel that fatigue has a negatively affected their ability to perform and to develop their full potential.

### Memory and concentration

Fatigue affects your memory and concentration. Difficulties in concentration, brain fog, clouding of thought, memory lapses... These are some of the feelings expressed by patients experiencing fatigue.

## 3. HOW TO DEAL WITH FATIGUE

### Disease activity -Inflammation

IBD therapy and control of inflammation is associated with an improvement in fatigue. For this reason, it is important to talk to your treating physician if you are experiencing fatigue in order to rule out that you IBD is not active.

### Altered gut microbiome

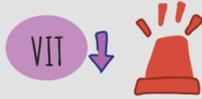
Patients with altered microbiome may benefit from different therapies provided. Knowing the cause of the microbiome alteration is important for identifying adequate therapy.

### Anemia

A basic anemia check-up is recommended periodically for patients with active disease and can be more spaced out in time for those in remission. Early treatment of iron deficiency with injected or oral iron is recommended. Blood tests controlling your vitamin B12 and folate are also recommended.

### Micronutrients deficiency

Testing for and replacing the deficient nutrient and ensuring a nutritionally replete diet will improve symptoms of fatigue.



### Medication

Patients suffering from fatigue should review their medication and together with their healthcare provider discuss other available treatment options.



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