

# A Guide to Understanding and Managing *Fatigue*



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*The information in this guide is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.*

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## *Introduction*

Fatigue is the most common symptom reported by people living with hepatitis C (HCV). One study found that 67% of HCV-positive people reported this symptom. Fatigue can range from mild to severe and can affect every area of life. Fatigue is difficult to quantify since it affects everyone differently and it cannot be measured by lab tests. Yet few symptoms can disturb quality of life more than relentless fatigue can. As Vince Lombardi said, “Fatigue makes cowards of us all.”

Some people with hepatitis C have constant fatigue while others may have fatigue cycles. Sometimes they feel energetic while other times they may feel so tired that they are unable to perform basic daily functions, such as going to work, cleaning the house or engaging in social events.

Fatigue is also a common side effect of HCV treatment. If you are currently being treated for HCV and are experiencing fatigue, discuss this with your medical provider. Other medical conditions can occur during HCV treatment. Some of these may be serious and require medical intervention. Anemia, depression, and hypothyroidism are side effects of HCV therapy associated with feelings of exhaustion. These can be treated.

We hope that some of these simple tips will help you manage HCV-related fatigue symptoms. Remember to report fatigue and other symptoms associated with HCV to your medical team. You can increase the quality of your medical care and general well-being by providing this valuable information while working in partnership with your medical provider.

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## 2. Causes of Fatigue

Before you assume your fatigue is associated with HCV, rule out other causes. Start by talking to your medical provider. Fatigue is a symptom of many conditions other than HCV infection. Common examples are thyroid dysfunction, anemia, depression, sleep apnea, vitamin deficiency and perimenopause. Poor diet, dehydration and lack of exercise can also lead to fatigue. Report all drug and supplement use to your medical provider. Include vitamins, herbs, over-the-counter and recreational substances as well as prescribed medications. These may be causing or contributing to your fatigue.

**Important note:** *If you feel too tired to get out of bed for more than 24 hours or if you feel confused, dizzy, or have a problem waking up, notify your medical provider as soon as possible.*

### Depression

Fatigue is both a symptom of and a cause of depression. Fatigue can lead to isolation and the curtailing of activities. When fatigue leads to a loss of meaningful social interactions, depression can occur. People report that an HCV diagnosis alone can induce depression and anxiety. Other factors that may lead to depression include insomnia, poor diet, stress, and lack of exercise, especially when compounded by fatigue. If you put all of these factors together, it is not surprising that many people with HCV experience depression.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad, anxious or “empty”
- Crying spells with no reasonable explanation
- Feeling hopeless or pessimistic
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Loss of interest or enjoyment in hobbies, social activities and sex

- Fatigue or decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, sometimes accompanied by decision-making and memory problems
- Insomnia and other sleep-related problems
- Appetite loss and/or weight loss, overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts

If you experience any of the above symptoms, contact your medical provider as soon as possible. Depression is an illness that can be treated.

**Important Note:** *If you have thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself or others, seek immediate professional help.*

It is ‘ok’ to recognize that you are depressed. It is not healthy to put a positive spin on everything. Talk to family and friends – a friendly ear can reduce anxiety and depression. Talk to professionals and seek guidance. Consider antidepressants, which can help with depression and energy. One of the most important strategies people living with hepatitis C can do for themselves is to join a support group.

### Medications, Supplements, and Other Substances

Alcohol, tobacco, excess caffeine, prescribed, recreational and over-the counter drugs can cause or worsen fatigue. Discuss the use of these with your medical provider. If a particular medication is contributing to fatigue, perhaps your provider can prescribe something else. If substance abuse or dependence is a problem for you, you may need help. Ask your doctor for available resources in your community.

### Sleep

The National Sleep Foundation states that the average adult needs 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Inadequate or poor quality sleep can lead to feelings of daytime tiredness. If you are having trouble sleeping or experience insomnia for more than

a few days, talk to your medical provider about medicines to help you sleep.

Common strategies to encourage sleep:

- Regular exercise during the day will promote better-quality sleep at night; however, avoid strenuous exercise too close to bedtime
- Stay away from caffeine in coffee, sodas, tea and chocolate for at least six hours before going to sleep
- Unless under medical supervision, refrain from taking stimulating drugs or supplements at least six hours before bedtime
- Avoid eating a large meal before going to bed
- Do not go to bed hungry
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol
- Sleep in a darkened room
- Find ways to minimize noise. Try earplugs, “white noise” or soothing background music
- Sleep separately from your bed partner if he or she snores, sleep talks or has other restless sleep habits
- Try to get 8 hours of sleep every night
- Go to bed at the same time every night
- Try building a sleep routine. For example, read a book, listen to relaxation tapes, or practice slow breathing
- Avoid stimulating mental activity for 2 to 3 hours before bedtime. This may include using the Internet or watching certain films or television shows
- Create a stress free zone—do not try to problem-solve too close to bed time
- Do not lay wake tossing and turning. If you cannot sleep for more than 20 or 30 minutes, get up

“If you can’t sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there and worrying. It’s the worry that gets you, not the loss of sleep.” - Dale Carnegie

and do something boring for a little while; then go back to bed

- Remember your bed is for sleeping, resting and sex. If you are not doing any of these, get out of bed

### 3. *Medical Treatment for Fatigue*

There are no approved medications to treat HCV-related fatigue, but some physicians try a variety of drugs including Ritalin and Provigil. There is concern about the potential for abuse of stimulating drugs. Ritalin is known to exacerbate substance use disorders. Studies are needed to determine the safety and effectiveness of these drugs before they are used to treat HCV-related fatigue. Your medical provider may prescribe antidepressants, particularly bupropion (Wellbutrin), for fatigue.

Treatment of any symptom or condition associated with HCV, including fatigue, may consist of treating the underlying HCV. Educate yourself about HCV medical treatment and consult with your medical provider about treatment options.

### 4. *Self-Help for Managing Fatigue*

When living with a chronic illness such as hepatitis C, energy management is often a top priority. When we push ourselves beyond our physical capacity, good judgment declines and accidents are more likely to occur. When fatigue sets in, it is easy to become depressed or anxious about the future.

There are many strategies for improving energy and managing fatigue. Try some of these simple tips and you may be surprised how much they help.

## Ask for Help

Do not be afraid to ask for help from family or friends. People are usually willing to help but may not want to interfere in your life. It never hurts to ask for help and you might be surprised to find that your family and friends will be more than happy to help. However, you may need to set limits so that it does not turn into a social exercise that may deplete your energy even more. If you have available resources, consider using a laundry or house cleaning service. The key is to simplify when possible.

## Attitude

Attitude cannot cure fatigue, but it can be a powerful ally. Watch for negative “self-talk.” When all else fails, laugh. There is no doubt about it; fatigue puts a damper on life. However, fatigue with humor is more tolerable than fatigue with misery. The choice is yours.

## Breathe

Incorrect breathing can lead to fatigue. When people experience stress or fatigue, they have a tendency to hold their breath or breathe shallowly. Try deep breathing exercises while focusing on the flow of air going in and out of your body.

## Conserve Energy

Numerous strategies can help conserve energy and reduce the likelihood of fatigue-induced injuries. Try some of these simple tips:

- Sit whenever possible. Use a tall stool at the sink to wash & prepare food; use an adjustable ironing

board as a work surface to sit at; wipe down the bathtub while still sitting in it; use a shower stool and hand held nozzle for bathing. Install places to sit at the top of the stairs or at the end hallways.

- Bathe before going to bed rather than in the morning. It takes less energy to put on nightwear since there is much less of it, leaving less to attend to in the morning. Always sit down while dressing and undressing.
- Maintain good posture and comfortable work heights. While standing, the working surface should be between waist and hips; while sitting, the surface should be no more than 3 inches below your elbows. Do not work at a low counter that causes you to bend over it. If the kitchen sink is low, place a pan under the dishpan to raise it closer to you.
- Keep your spine erect when you stand and sit.
- Avoid stretching & bending when you work. Keep commonly used items within easy reach. Have long handles on the dustpan, bath brush, and use tongs to reach for light items on the floor.
- Work in a well-lighted environment, at a comfortable temperature with good ventilation.
- Wear supportive and comfortable slip-on shoes.
- Drag, slide or push rather than lift heavy objects.
- Use both hands for activities: setting the table, dusting, holding cookware.
- Avoid stress and rushing. Frustration and irritation increase fatigue. Pace yourself; rushing leads to mistakes and accidents which then require extra energy to clean up or resolve, and have the potential for injury.

“I’ve learned from experience that the greater part of happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.” – Martha Washington

## Educate Family and Friends

Talk to your friends and family about what it means for you to be fatigued. Tell them that at times, you may not be able to participate in social functions or you may need to leave early because of fatigue. Sometimes just knowing that you can cancel or leave an engagement early relieves the stress of feeling that you are letting people down.

Learn to say “no” to family and friends who have unrealistic expectations regarding your energy level.

### Exercise

It may seem counterintuitive, but regular light to moderate exercise is one of the best strategies for combating fatigue. People who exercise regularly experience less fatigue, increased body strength and feel better about themselves. Exercise is also an important factor for losing or maintaining weight. Regular bowel habits rely on physical activity. Try to stay as active as possible but do not overdo it. If you are unaccustomed to exercise, have a complicated medical condition, or are over 50 years old, it is advisable to speak to your medical provider before embarking on this. Your healthcare provider or an exercise physiologist can help determine what level of activity is right for you.

If you are ready to take this on, start slowly. Five to fifteen minute intervals, two to three times daily, may help fend off relentless fatigue. Exercise comes in many forms. Walking is one of the best exercises for relieving fatigue. Other effective forms of activity include biking, dancing, gardening, resistance training, Pilates, Qigong, swimming, Tai Chi, and Yoga. Basically, you can choose any activity that re-energizes you without being over-fatiguing. As you venture into the realm of exercise, include stretching as part of your regimen. Start slowly and increase your activity according to how your body responds. Listen to your body and let it guide you. Start slowly with a 2- or 3-minute walk, 2 or 3 times daily. Gradually work your way up to 30 minutes of activity 5 days a week. The goal is to find a balance of activity that revitalizes you during the day and promotes sleep at night.

### Hydration

Dehydration can lead to fatigue, so maintaining adequate water intake is important. This is even more essential when taking certain medications, such as HCV treatment. There are many ways to calculate a healthy person’s minimum daily wa-

ter needs. During HCV therapy, you should drink at least the daily requirement and possibly more, depending on your medical provider’s advice. One method of calculating your minimum daily water requirement is to divide your body weight in pounds by two. That number represents the total number of ounces you should strive to consume each day. For instance, a person who weighs 150 pounds will need to drink 75 ounces of water per day (nine 8 oz glasses, or slightly more than two quarts or two liters per day).

**Note:** *When you compute the daily amount of fluid needed remember that the food you eat and other liquids you consume count towards your daily total.*

*Tips for drinking sufficient water:*

- Drink water before you feel thirsty. This will help you to stay well hydrated, since thirst is a sign of dehydration
- Drink water instead of caffeinated beverages such as sodas, tea, and coffee. Caffeinated beverages deplete the body of fluids, which necessitates drinking even more water
- Keep water in places you frequent at home, in the office, and in the car
- Add a slice of lemon, lime, orange, mint, ginger, or cucumber to flavor your water
- Sip water throughout the day instead of gulping it, to give your body more time to absorb it

Additional information on converting measurements is available at <http://www.easysurf.cc/cnver13.htm#fotog1>.

### Laughter and Recreation

Participating in pleasurable activities can be revitalizing. Pick at least one enjoyable activity and find the time to do it regularly. Look for opportunities to laugh. Laughter triggers “feel good” hormones and stimulates the immune system. Having HCV can be painful and burdensome – if we let it. Laughter is not a cure, but it can lighten the load.

## Listen to Your Body

An important strategy for managing fatigue is to listen to your body. It is important that you allow yourself to rest. Pushing yourself unnecessarily may prolong fatigue and make you feel worse. Fatigue can cause depression and anxiety. Be prepared to indulge yourself in enjoyable activities that require little energy such as meditating, reading, knitting, watching a video or sports event, etc.

## Massage

People report that massage can improve energy and general well-being. Massage techniques that encourage lymphatic flow may be particularly helpful for boosting energy.

## Nutrition

A healthy and nutritious diet based on recommendations from health experts includes finding a balance between the calories you consume with the amount of energy you use. Eat small frequent meals, consisting of low fat, high fiber foods. Eat a variety of foods that include fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. Try to stay away from foods that are high in fat, sugar and sodium. If possible, consult with a registered dietician or nutritionist.

Eating well does not take a lot of effort, but may involve a little planning. There are plenty of available healthy food choices without having to cook from scratch. For instance, you can buy and toss pre-cut fresh or frozen vegetables into soup, salads, or omelets. Fast food restaurants now offer healthy alternatives to the usual fried fare. A sandwich made from whole grain bread and piled high with vegetables is simple, healthy, and delicious.

“Nearing death, an elderly friend was asked if she would have done anything differently. She replied, “I would have cleaned less.”

## Organize

Staying organized is sometimes difficult, but it is the key to utilizing limited energy. Maintain organized work areas, with all supplies for each task stored together:

- Put all cleaning supplies in a bucket or carpenter’s apron
- Put the can opener in the cupboard with the canned goods
- Store pots & pans near the stove
- Keep items within easy reach, avoiding bending and reaching
- Eliminate unnecessary clutter
- Utilize organizing equipment such as revolving shelves, stacking bins, lazy susans, etc.
- Use wheels to transport items to convey equipment and supplies in one trip, such as laundry cart, grocery basket, and wheeled luggage
- Use a wagon to transport groceries from car to the house, a cart to transport laundry and foods from the fridge to the counter, etc.
- Try to keep your living space picked up and in order. Clutter can create stress and trying to clean up an entire apartment or house at one time can be overwhelming

## Pace and Prioritize

One way to conserve energy is to pace yourself, decreasing certain activities and increasing the amount of rest. Activities should be prioritized according to their importance. If the house needs to be cleaned but you have a dinner date that evening, think about saving your energy for the evening and doing the house cleaning later in the week. Do not sacrifice needless energy at the expense of more important areas that provide more balance in your life.

Ask yourself – is this task necessary? Will the benefit outweigh the risk of fatigue? There are many alternatives to common chores such as to allow

“He that takes rest is greater than he that takes cities.” – Benjamin Franklin

dishes to drip dry, buy permanent press or fabrics that need little attention beyond laundering, use frozen or pre-cut vegetables instead of peeling and cutting.

### Personal Appearance and Grooming

Try to maintain good grooming habits. If you take care of yourself and are freshly groomed you will generally feel better. This can range from a shower to a new, easy-to-care-for hairstyle. Keeping an energetic and positive attitude is easier when you take good care of your body, including your appearance. When you look good, you generally feel better.

### Positive Thinking

Positive thinking is a learned skill. Performed on a regular basis, positive thinking can replace negative thinking. One study evaluated people with chronic fatigue. After interviewing them, it was noted that people often said to themselves and others, “I am tired.” Researchers divided the study subjects into two groups – one group was instructed to not do anything differently. The other group was instructed to substitute the phrase, “I am getting my energy back” every time they felt tired. The outcome was that the people in the second group reported significantly reduced fatigue. This example of the power of positive thinking can be a useful tool in overcoming inertia.

**Hint:** *Practice positive thinking even if you do not believe it. Over time, positive thinking can become a habit, and can help improve many aspects of your health.*

### Relaxation and Stress Reduction

Many factors can cause or intensify fatigue, with stress being a common one. Try some of these simple stress-reduction tips:

- Take a warm bath
- Listen to relaxing music
- Light a candle
- Try meditation
- Prayer – practice your spiritual preference at least once a day
- Sit or walk in a place of natural beauty, such as a beach, garden, or park
- Spoil yourself with massage
- Stretch your muscles
- Make it a point to take a few deep breaths throughout the day

### Rest

It is important to rest when you get tired or when you have time. Taking short naps or rest periods during the day may help. Try not to sleep too much during the day because this could affect how well you sleep at night. If you need to nap, do so early in the afternoon and try to sleep only for 10-20 minutes. If you are concerned about sleeping too long, use an alarm clock. Getting too much rest may make you even more tired and can interfere with nighttime sleep, so try to find a balance. You may be revitalized just by taking a few minutes to breathe, stretch, daydream, unwind, meditate, pray, listen to music, read or think about happy or positive experiences.

### Stock up on Supplies

Since the duration and intensity of fatigue cycles are unpredictable, prepare for these times by stocking up on supplies. Buy extra regularly used items, such as toilet paper, soap and food. Store healthy snacks, dried, canned and frozen foods/meals for those times when you are unable to shop. Shop when stores are likely to be the least busy. Ask for assistance to load groceries into your car.

## Support Groups

Groups can provide support and advice on combating fatigue. People who attend HCV support groups generally experience fatigue, and have developed strategies to cope with the physical and emotional effects of fatigue. You do not have to go through it alone.

## 5. The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Fatigue Management

### Acupuncture / Acupressure

Acupuncture is based on the idea that “qi” flows through the body in channels called meridians; each organ system has a set of channels. Acupuncture needles are inserted into various parts of the body that correspond to areas or channels that are believed to be blocked. Acupuncture has been found to alleviate pain and diminish fatigue. Acupressure is based on the same principle as acupuncture but finger pressure is used in the place of acupuncture needles.

*Note: There are many other healing practices that may be beneficial for managing fatigue. Some examples are Ayurveda, Reiki, Shiatsu, and Yoga. Ask your medical provider, support group members, friends, and family for practitioner recommendations.*

### Vitamins and Nutritional Supplements

A well-balanced diet should contain all the essential vitamins and minerals you need. Some people use vitamin supplements for added insurance. Taking large doses or “mega” supplementation may harm the liver. If you use supplements, discuss this with your medical provider. The general opinion is to choose a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement that contains no or low iron and meets the daily requirements.

## Supplements Associated with Fatigue Management

Dietary supplements share some common properties with drugs in that they have side effects, interact with other substances and should be avoided by some people in some circumstances. Always talk to your medical provider before using supplements.

Medicinal herbs and supplements should not be taken by patients with cirrhosis or transplanted organ recipients unless specifically ordered by their medical provider, followed by clearance from their liver specialist. Discontinue all dietary supplements at least one week prior to any dental or medical procedure that has a bleeding risk or uses anesthesia.

*The following dietary supplements are associated with fatigue management and are considered generally safe for average adults:*

**Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10)** – Insufficient information is available to establish the efficacy of CoQ10 for relief of fatigue. Rare reports of increased liver enzymes. A small study reported organ damage in heart patients using CoQ10 during intense exercise. Vigorous exercise is discouraged with simultaneous use of CoQ10. Use cautiously if there is a history of diabetes, low blood pressure, thyroid disease or use of anticoagulants (warfarin, aspirin, ibuprofen, etc.) CoQ10 is known to interact with a long list of other drugs and supplements. No safety data is available regarding children, pregnant or nursing mothers. CoQ10 is sold in varying amounts and qualities. These factors coupled with insufficient research supporting the use of CoQ10 for fatigue makes it difficult to establish a recommended dosage.

**Cordyceps mushrooms** – Very little is known about this fungus. Its purported uses include fatigue and hepatitis. To date there have been virtually no known adverse reactions to cordyceps. Diabetics should use cautiously as cordyceps may lower blood glucose. The “recommended dose” is

approximately 1 gram 2 or 3 times daily. Cordyceps has not been tested on children, pregnant or nursing mothers.

**Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA)** – DHEA is a hormone. For this reason, people with prostate or hormone-sensitive cancer should avoid DHEA. Has multiple uses, but there is insufficient information to judge the efficacy of DHEA for fatigue relief. According to Natural Standard, because DHEA utilizes the liver’s “cytochrome P450” enzyme system, it may interfere with the body’s ability to process certain drugs and other dietary substances. DHEA may interfere with clotting ability. Pregnant and nursing women should avoid DHEA. Not enough evidence to recommend safe use for children. Dosage recommendations unknown.

**Dong Quai** – This herb is used commonly in Chinese medicine. Dong Quai has many purported uses, none of which have been researched conclusively. It is frequently used to treat conditions primarily affecting women, but is also used to offset fatigue. In Chinese medicine, Dong Quai is usually blended with other herbs and used for medicinal purposes. In the U.S. and Europe, Dong Quai is used as a flavoring agent in food and is considered to be safe for that use. When used medicinally at higher doses, safety has not been established. May cause gastrointestinal symptoms and raise blood sugar levels. Also reported are headache, lightheadedness/dizziness, sedation/drowsiness, insomnia, irritability, fever, sweating, weakness, abnormal heart rhythms, blood pressure abnormalities, wheezing/asthma, hot flashes, worsening premenstrual symptoms, reduced menstrual flow, increased male breast size, kidney problems, and skin rash. An oil found in Dong Quai may be carcinogenic. Use cautiously with bleeding or blood clotting disorders (including advanced liver disease), and/or decreased clotting ability, such as those taking NSAIDs or anticoagulants. May cause photosensitivity (sun sensitivity). The safety for children is not established. Pregnant and breastfeeding

women should avoid. May interact with cardiac and blood pressure medications. There are disputes over whether or not Dong Quai shares some of the same properties of estrogen or how it interacts with estrogen, other hormones, or estrogen-sensitive medications and conditions. May also interact with other herbs and dietary substances. In particular, use cautiously with substances with similar anticoagulant properties, such as Gingo Biloba, and those with other estrogen-like properties, such as Black Cohosh. May raise blood sugar levels and alter coagulation labs, such as PT and INR. No standard dosing has been established.

**Evening Primrose Oil (EPO)** – Insufficient information is available to judge the efficacy of EPO for relief of fatigue. EPO interacts with a number of drugs and dietary substances. Contraindicated for those with schizophrenia. Seizures have been reported by people taking EPO in conjunction with certain medications or anesthesia. EPO may interfere with clotting ability. Pregnant and nursing women should avoid EPO. Not enough evidence to recommend safe use for children. Dosage recommendations for fatigue are not established.

**Ginseng (many varieties)** – This herb is the most researched supplement on this list. Ginseng has been widely studied and has earned a prominent reputation in Chinese medicine. Purported to improve mental ability and fatigue along with many other uses. Some of these uses are supported by clinical data and have earned the approval of a number of worldwide organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and Germany’s Commission E. The “recommended dose” is 100 mg of standardized ginseng extract 1 to 2 times a day. *Should not be taken continuously.* If taken continuously for 2 weeks, discontinue for 2 weeks before restarting. Contraindicated for those with hypertension. Multiple side effects and warnings, including cardiac, bleeding, and manic symptoms. May alter blood pressure, blood glucose levels and liver lab results. May interact with many drugs including warfarin, aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, MAO inhibitors, calcium

channel blockers, digoxin, and opioids. The list of other herbs and dietary supplements that ginseng may interact with is considerably long. Should not be used with other stimulants, including excessive caffeine. Not enough evidence to recommend safe use for children. Ginseng should be avoided by pregnant and nursing women and those with breast cancer. Andrew Weil, MD suggests using American ginseng since the Asian variety is associated with insomnia, irritability, and increased blood pressure. He also states that “real ginseng” contains ginsenosides.

**Maitake** – Maitake is a mushroom, making it both a food and a supplement. As a source of food, it has been found to be safe. Very little is known about Maitake’s safety and efficacy as a higher dose supplement. Some purported uses include immune system stimulation, antihypertensive, antidiabetes, and management of chronic fatigue. Maitake may lower blood pressure and blood glucose levels. Use Maitake cautiously if taking medications to treat blood pressure or blood glucose levels. Use cautiously if taking other herbs or supplements that are known to also lower blood pressure or blood glucose levels. No standard dosing has been established for Maitake.

**Rhodiola (Rose Root)** – May reduce fatigue. Very little is known about this herb. To date there have been no reported adverse events. May cause irritability or insomnia. Use very cautiously with bipolar disease since rhodiola may act as an antidepressant. The “recommended dose” is 100 to 200 mg 2 times a day. No safety data available regarding children, pregnant or nursing mothers.

**Vitamin B-12** – This is an essential vitamin. Insufficient B-12 can lead to many health problems, including fatigue. Fortunately, B-12 deficiency is rare since the human body stores several years of it. The elderly, vegans, and those with advanced liver and gastrointestinal diseases are at the greatest risk of insufficient B-12. Vitamin B-12 is found in animal-based foods, including fish, poultry and dairy products. It can also be found in fortified foods, such as cereals.

It is always important to obtain a good medical diagnosis before taking supplements. There is not enough research to conclude that vitamin B-12 will ease or eliminate general fatigue. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for most adults is 2.4 mg/day. Since some older adults are unable to absorb B-12, it is recommended that they supplement with 25 to 100 mcg/day. Dosages vary for strict vegetarians, pregnant and nursing women, and those with health conditions that require B-12 supplementation. B-12 is sometimes given by injection.

**Note:** *Valerian is an herb frequently used for insomnia and sleep problems. Those with HCV and other liver conditions should avoid this herb.*

## 6. Fatigue and the Workplace

Fatigue can affect your ability to perform workplace responsibilities. The decision to disclose your HCV status to an employer is a difficult one that needs careful consideration. You may have certain workplace protections, so find out as much as possible about what is allowed by law. The American with Disability Act (ADA) provides certain protections. To find out more, contact the ADA at 800-232-9675 or go to [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov). Some states may have more protections than the federal law so contact your state disability office. The Family Medical Leave Act allows for some time off, but again, become familiar with these benefits before asking for medical leave or accommodations. Know your rights!

At times, fatigue may diminish physical, emotional and cognitive abilities. When appropriate, your employer may be able to work with you and help with any difficulties you have performing your job responsibilities. Some strategies that may help include:

- Flexible scheduling to take advantage of the time of the day that you feel more energetic
- Change in or reduced job responsibilities

- Explore other job opportunities that are less physically or mentally demanding

Fellow employees may become resentful if they think that you are receiving special treatment or you are not “pulling your weight.” Additionally, there may be fear about your HCV infection. If you are comfortable with self-disclosure, try to educate others about HCV, fatigue, and how it influences your personal and professional life.

Good communication between you and those you work with can make a huge difference. Let people know when you need help. Delegate tasks whenever possible. Remember to take breaks. Eat, maintain fluids and move your body by walking and stretching throughout the day. Take care of yourself in every way possible.

## 7. Final Words

Fatigue is not much fun. Fortunately, there are ways to manage it, keeping fatigue from ruining your life. By practicing some simple techniques, you can reduce your risk for injuries and conserve your energy for the things in life that are more important to you. The most important goal is take care of yourself. You will be of more use to the world if you practice self-care.

## 8. Sources and Resources

- Hepatitis C Support Project’s Web site [www.hcvadvocate.org](http://www.hcvadvocate.org)
- HCSP Factsheet Series *Hepatitis C and Complementary and Alternative Medicine*
- HCSP’s *A Guide to Hepatitis and Disability*
- HCSP’s *A Guide to Hepatitis C: Treatment Side Effect Management*
- HCSP’s *A Guide to Hepatitis C*
- HCSP’s *First Steps with HCV for the Newly Diagnosed*
- HCSP’s *Hepatitis C Support Group Manual*
- HCSP’s *Management of Hepatitis C by the Primary Care Provider: Monitoring Guidelines*

- American Occupational Therapy Association [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)
- Arthritis Foundation [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)
- Cancer Symptoms.org [www.cancersymptoms.org](http://www.cancersymptoms.org)
- Department of Labor [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)
- Drugs.com: Drug Information Online [www.drugs.com](http://www.drugs.com)
- iherb [www.iherb.com/CategoriesList.aspx?c=1&cid=2430](http://www.iherb.com/CategoriesList.aspx?c=1&cid=2430)
- Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center [www.mskcc.org/aboutherbs](http://www.mskcc.org/aboutherbs)
- National Institutes of Health National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine <http://nccam.nih.gov>
- National Institute of Mental Health [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm)
- National Mental Health Association [www.depression-screening.org](http://www.depression-screening.org)
- The National Sleep Foundation [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)
- Natural Standard [www.naturalstandard.com](http://www.naturalstandard.com)
- The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports [www.fitness.gov](http://www.fitness.gov)
- U.S. government nutrition information [www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov)

### Support Groups

To find a hepatitis C, chronic illness, or depression support group in your area, ask your doctor, search the Internet, or contact an HCV advocacy group. The HCV Advocate Web site provides information about hepatitis C support groups in many areas: <http://www.hcvadvocate.org/community/Groups.asp>.

“Even sleepers are workers and collaborators on what goes on in the universe.” - Heraclitus