

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES OF ENERGY CONSERVATION

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It is important to keep in mind that when living with a chronic illness such as hepatitis C, energy conservation should be a top priority. When we push ourselves beyond our physical capacity, good judgment declines and accidents occur more frequently. As well, activities should be prioritized according to their importance. If the house needs to be cleaned but you have a dinner date that night, think about saving your energy for the evening and doing the house cleaning later in the week. While a clean, spotless house is an admirable goal you don't want to sacrifice needless energy at the expense of more important social engagements.

Planning IS Everything

Make a plan for the day, week, month. Alternate heavy and light activities. Do strenuous activities in the morning while you are still rested, breaking the task up into simple components if necessary. Spread tasks throughout the day with frequent rest periods in between and plan on lying down or napping if this is helpful. Do not attempt to accomplish more than is realistic.

Get Off That Thing and Exercise

Keeping fit is an important goal for coping with fatigue. Incorporate light to moderate exercise routines into your everyday plans. Consider resistant type exercises – use light weights or common household items such as a phone book to keep those muscles toned and ready. Plan to stretch before and after strenuous tasks.

Analyze, Analyze, Analyze

Ask yourself –is this task really necessary? Allow dishes to drip dry, buy permanent press or fabrics that need little attention beyond laundering, use frozen or pre-cut fresh vegetables instead of peeling & cutting. Ask for help - have someone else do some of the work: another family member, a housekeeper. Consider using a laundry service for heavy articles such as curtains, blankets. The key is to simplify when possible.

Can you say “Organize”?

Have organized work centers, with all supplies for each task stored together: Dry ingredients, mixing bowls, measuring tools together; cleaning supplies in a pail; can opener in the cupboard with the canned goods; pots & pans near the stove. Store items within easy reach. Avoid bending & reaching. Eliminate unnecessary clutter. Utilize organizing equipment such as revolving shelves, stacking bins, lazy-susans, etc.

Use wheels to transport: laundry cart, grocery basket, kitchen cart – to convey equipment & supplies in one trip. Load the cart with all the goods needed to set the table in one trip rather than several. Use a wagon to transport groceries from car to the house, a cart to transport the laundry, foods from the fridge to the counter, etc.

Take a Load Off

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, or use a shower stool and hand held shower for bathing. 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 and you will have less to attend to in the morning. Always sit down while dressing and undressing.

Mama said – Don't Slouch, Stand up Straight !

Use good posture and comfortable work heights. While standing, the working surface should be between waist & hips, while sitting, the surface should be no more than 3 inches below your elbows. Don't 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. Stand & sit with spine erect.

While you are working avoid stretching & bending. Keep most commonly used items within easy reach. Have long handles on the dustpan, bath brush, use tongs to reach for something on the floor.

Work in a well-lighted environment that is at a comfortable temperature and has good ventilation. Wear supportive and comfortable shoes.

Use both hands for activities: setting the table, dusting, holding pots.

Avoid stress and rushing. Frustration and irritation increases fatigue. Pace yourself; rushing leads to mistakes and accidents which then require extra energy to clean up or resolve, not to mention potential for injury.

Prepare for those Damn Fatigue Cycles

Flare-ups are a common experience with HCV, which can drastically reduce your energy level and quality of life. Prepare for these times by storing dried, canned and frozen foods/meals available for the times when you are not able to get to the store. Keep healthy snacks around the house and remember to eat small frequent healthy meals. Skip unimportant tasks until a better time.

Listen to your body. It is important that you allow yourself to rest --pushing yourself unnecessarily could prolong your "flare-up" and make you feel worse. We all know that fatigue can cause depression and anxiety. Be prepared to indulge yourself in enjoyable activities that require little energy such as meditating, reading, watching a video, knitting, etc.

GO AHEAD - WHINE

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 help with anxiety and depression. Talk to professionals and seek guidance. Consider antidepressants – they can help with depression and energy. Join a support group.

Everyone experiences physical, mental and emotional changes throughout their lives and must adapt accordingly in order to safely maintain their ability to function. By practicing some of the above techniques you will reduce your risk for injuries and conserve your energy for the things in life that are important to you.

Sources: Arthritis Foundation website:

<http://www.arthritis.org> & American Occupational Therapy Association – website: <http://www.aota.org>