

Fatigue: *“It’s like a wave that sweeps over you out of nowhere...you feel you need to shut down” SC*

Fatigue may be experienced as a direct consequence of a neurological condition, or secondary to other symptoms or consequences of the condition. The underlying physiological mechanisms of fatigue remain poorly understood. There is some evidence to suggest fatigue occurs when connections between the nerves between the brain and body have been disrupted and/or hormones and neurotransmitters have been depleted.

An acoustic neuroma is a benign tumour that grows in an area of the brain where there are many delicate connections between different parts of the brain and body, the brainstem. It grows on the nerve which helps to control hearing and balance and which is close to the facial nerve. Depending on its size, the neuroma may cause pressure on these nerves, and potentially the brainstem itself, and thereby disrupt certain functions and information travelling between various parts of the brain and body. If you have radiotherapy or surgical intervention, this may also disrupt connections depending on how tricky it is to remove your tumour.

Another reason fatigue may occur is because of the additional mental or physical effort people need to make to compensate for symptoms they experience. This may be struggling to hear, particularly in noisy places, poor balance affecting walking, difficulty with vision or speech due to facial palsy, or finding it harder to concentrate and think things through. It may also be due to the emotional effort of coming to terms with the diagnosis and implications on your life.

Fatigue is a symptom that is a consequence of the acoustic neuroma; it’s not laziness!

Let’s use the analogy of a smartphone. Our phone needs enough charge to make calls, surf the internet, play games and take photos, and certain functions can drain the battery really quickly. Acoustic neuroma symptoms that may make us more vulnerable to fatigue include: hearing loss, tinnitus, dizziness/vertigo and loss of balance, facial numbness, tingling or pain, thinking skills and headaches. The emotional impact may also contribute to fatigue experienced.

Activities that rely on abilities that have been disrupted as a consequence of the neuroma will make us particularly fatigued (triggers). So, if we have tinnitus or hearing loss, being in noisy environments is likely to fatigue us very quickly.

How do I manage my fatigue?

Pacing is commonly recommended for people experiencing fatigue, and includes having regular breaks, planning your time, prioritising and working within your available resources. Knowing what activities trigger fatigue helps pacing.

Energy conservation techniques are ways to get around some of the practical consequences of the AN, such as using a diary, smartphone calendar or notebook, to help slow down the drain on your ‘energy battery’.

Recharging the battery can be done by having a short nap (not after 4pm as this will disrupt the sleep-wake cycle), relaxation exercises, Mindfulness techniques, listening to music, going for a walk, changing from a physical to a mental activity, or vice versa.

Leading a healthy lifestyle by establishing a regular sleep-wake routine, eating a healthy balanced diet - including slow release carbohydrates and regular meals - hydrating throughout the day and taking small amounts of regular exercise (seek medical advice if you are uncertain what you are able to do).

Other medical conditions or any medication you are taking could be contributing to your fatigue so it is important to rule this out by speaking to your doctor. Additionally, if it is difficult to manage your emotions, it would be helpful to discuss this with your doctor.

This leaflet is a condensed version of a full article available on the BANA website, which includes sources of evidence for the claims and information supplied. See <http://www.bana-uk.com/about-acoustic-neuroma/fatigue/>

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DISCLAIMER: This factsheet is for information purposes only and should not be a substitute for medical advice – you should always see your doctor and/or medical professional to support you to understand and manage your fatigue.

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