

## Here's Why You're Always So Tired

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It's no secret that we all live frantic, fast-paced lives. Between families, relationships, work and friends, there's little time left to focus on our own well-being. Is it really any wonder that we're kind of exhausted all the time?

Turns out that being constantly tired is something of a phenomenon. Beyond general sleepiness that may occur if you miss a couple hours of your usual eight-hour

block (or six or seven, if that's your normal routine), chronic tiredness manifests itself in different ways.

It makes you feel like you can't perform to your fullest capacity. Even the simplest acts — taking a shower or brushing your teeth, for example — sometimes feel overwhelming and complicated.

While many doctors will tell you to increase your sleep and cut down on stress, those obvious solutions aren't always the answer. In fact, you may be missing the actual cause of your exhaustion entirely and left even *more* puzzled when you can't get through the day without hitting a wall. What's responsible for this mass increase in exhaustion and this seemingly collective notion that day-to-day living is such a tremendous chore?

If you're sick of wondering, "Why am I so tired?" all the time, we went straight to the experts.

### **You're Doing Too Much**

"We are never turning off," says Dr. Gabrielle Francis, naturopathic doctor and author of *The Rockstar Remedy*. "This syndrome is also known as 'wired and tired.' It can manifest as fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, overwhelm, irritability, depression and other stress-related symptoms."

The notion that we must always be on top of things and ready to tackle every single issue head on can take its toll indiscriminately. It may lead to adrenal fatigue, a non-medical term used to describe weakened adrenal glands. The latter are responsible for creating hormones, including stress-busting cortisol. If your adrenal glands are constantly pumping out cortisol in response to nonstop chaos (both internal and external), they'll eventually grow tired enough that your adrenal system finally buckles under the pressure.

This results in the many symptoms that give you that all-encompassing feeling of exhaustion.

### **Iron and Thyroid Checks**

Chronic exhaustion may be attributed to a number of recognized conditions, too, all of which require medical attention. If you find yourself unusually tired during your period, for example, you may have anemia or low-iron blood that doesn't effectively deliver optimal oxygen throughout your body. Since anemia may also manifest itself in other equally concerning ways (such as shortness of breath and an irregular heartbeat), it's important to seek a doctor's opinion. After diagnosis, dietary adjustments may help you feel better. Seek out foods rich in vitamin B12, folic acid and iron.

If you show other signs of extreme tiredness, like muscle fatigue or weight loss, you may have a weakened thyroid gland. In other words, it's not helping your body produce sufficient energy to stay active and strong. A thyroid hormone blood test will determine whether this gland is functioning properly.

### **You Are What You Eat**

Your everyday diet may also be to blame, as it turns out. "Instead of being energized by food, after eating most of us find ourselves feeling heavy, bloated and tired," says Rae Roth, author of *Cut Your Cravings*. High-glycemic foods, such as white rice, potatoes and white bread, can cause a rapid spike in your blood sugar, followed by that all-too-familiar crash shortly thereafter. Before you know it, you're struggling to keep your eyes open.

There are other dietary substances that contribute to overall fatigue and it's often not until you detect a pattern of regular exhaustion that you connect the dots. "Gluten and gliadin — the main proteins in wheat and many grains — are the most common allergens in food," adds Francis. "They're often the mystery substances triggering issues like fatigue. And MSG, hidden in most packaged and processed foods, should be avoided at all times. It's linked to toxicity syndromes of the nervous system. Some of its negative effects include headaches, anxiety and fatigue."

### **...or What You Drink**

Many of us are guilty of self-medicating in the face of exhaustion. But those quick fixes (think good ol' Red Bull and bottomless cups of coffee) may be doing more harm than good. "Note how much [caffeine] you are consuming," advises Karen Brennan, MSW. "Coffee increases your cortisol levels and puts stress on the adrenals. Caffeine can also contribute to mood and behavioral shifts." She suggests Teecino, a coffee substitute, as you gradually reduce your caffeine intake.

### **It's Time to Disconnect**

Finally, consider the side effects of simply being 100 percent connected from the moment you rise to the second you hit the pillow at night. How many of us are guilty of lying in bed with our iPads, checking text messages every five minutes and browsing Facebook first thing in the morning?

It's a cycle of constant input, according to Dr. Wendie Trubow, MBA and president of Five Journeys. "We are notoriously bad at disconnecting. This causes stress and leads to exhaustion. If used at night, the lights emitted can alter our brain waves and decrease the quality of our sleep."

Chronic exhaustion doesn't always have to be a life sentence. Might it be worth it to finally pay some real, focused attention to our minds and bodies and treat ourselves the way we treat our loved ones? Our bodies put up with a whole lot, each and every day and deserve some respect in turn. Whether it's intuitively disengaging from the obvious stressors of life — the unhealthy habits, the junky foods, the late nights — or paying better attention to our symptoms and visiting the doctor, we owe it to ourselves.