

Fatigue after a stroke!

Information leaflet about **P**ost-**S**troke **F**atigue



Being tired is as much a part of life as being hungry or thirsty. However, at least one in three people experiences excessive fatigue and exhaustion after a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA or “mini-stroke”). This is called post-stroke fatigue, or PSF for short. PSF can mean that people are no longer able to

cope with everyday life as usual. It might already have been noticed in hospital (or possibly not), but mostly the extent of PSF becomes really noticeable back home. Therefore, we would like to give you some information about PSF to take home with you. Let's start with the key features of PSF:

Key features of post-stroke fatigue:

- Lack of energy to carry out activities
- Excessively rapid fatigue when performing activities
- Unpredictable feelings of tiredness with no obvious explanation
- Increased stress sensitivity
- Unusual need for lengthy sleep
- Longer recovery time

Even one of these features may indicate a PSF.

This is how people with PSF describe their fatigue:

«Sometimes tiredness suddenly takes over, I don't know why. I can't explain it»

«I'm tired all the time. I don't really feel any difference throughout the day.»

«I can just put the groceries down. Nothing more. I feel so weak and tired out.»

Anyone can be affected by PSF after a stroke or a TIA. There is even evidence that people who have had a mild to moderate stroke or TIA are particularly likely to have PSF. Fatigue can also be the only remaining symptom.

Possible effects of post-stroke fatigue on everyday life

In contrast to other stroke related consequences, such as hemiplegia, PSF is less well-known, even though

the symptom – while invisible to other people – can have a huge impact on daily life.

The experienced effects of PSF vary from person to person:

Large groups of people and noise can rapidly cause fatigue. Activities in the household, at work or during leisure time can no longer be performed as usual.



Other causes for fatigue

In addition to PSF, concomitant diseases can also cause affected people to feel tired:

- Sleep disorders and sleep-related breathing disorders (e.g. sleep apnea)
- Depression
- Anaemia
- Diabetes mellitus
- Hypothyroidism

Likewise, certain medications can cause fatigue. It is important to have your family doctor rule out possible concomitant diseases and other factors as the cause of fatigue.

Do you feel you might be affected by PSF? Do you experience overwhelming exhaustion in your daily life? Do you have difficulty maintaining your routine activities?

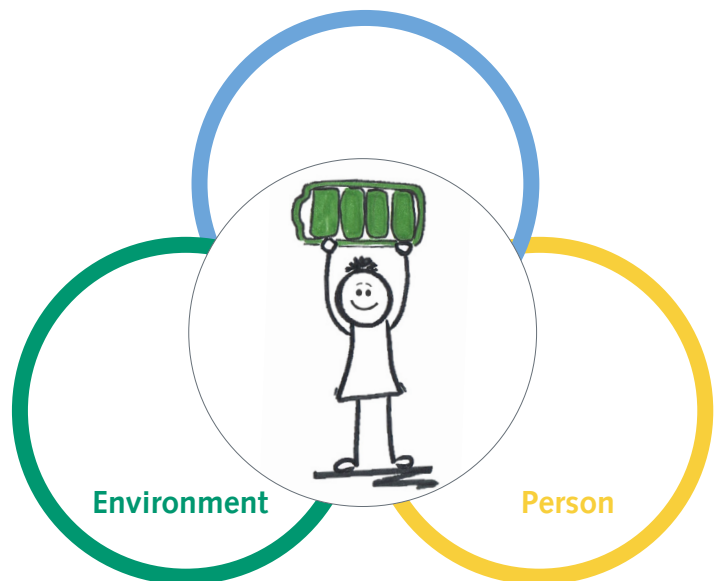
The strategies that can help you deal with PSF are as varied as the effects experienced. People with PSF have reported helpful strategies that positively affect

their activities, their environment or their own person.

We'd like to encourage you to try out some of the following strategies. Start wherever you feel like or see a possibility.

Activities

- Avoid over exertion by:
 - Setting priorities
 - Planning ahead
 - Dividing activities into short blocks; alternate between activities
 - Taking regular breaks
 - Incorporating moments of relaxation
- Include light exercise in your everyday life, avoid long periods of inactivity
- Do activities together with other people
 - Choose the type and duration of activity that suits you
- Make sure you get well-balanced sleep
 - If necessary, take a short nap during the day (the benefit is individual)



Thanks to changes in activities, in the environment and in the person to more energy.

Environment

- Tell family, friends and colleagues about PSF so that they are able to support you
- Use assistive technology to save energy which can be used for other activities
- Switch off disturbing sources of light and noise
- Reach out to a point of contact/experts

Person

- Know your own energy resources and learn how to allocate your energy
- Take pressure off yourself, accept bad days
- Practice self-talk to motivate yourself

Observe how you feel as you try out the strategies. What works for you? What doesn't? It might help to keep a diary and write down your experiences so that you can notice any changes.

Family members

What can you do as a family member?

- Read this information leaflet and talk to the person concerned about it.
- Reduce demands on the person concerned.
- Help your family member adapt their daily routine and activities; if necessary, find suitable new routines together.
- Offer your support in finding an appropriate contact point.

Talk together about PSF and the impact on your shared life.

This information leaflet is intended as a “starting point” for PSF. Please contact a professional if you suspect you might be affected by PSF and need more support.

Other causes for fatigue (see text box on second page) should always be ruled out, which is why it's advisable to consult a doctor.

Other professionals who can provide support in coping with PSF are occupational therapists, neuropsychologists and physiotherapists (see text box below).

Specially trained occupational therapists offer energy management training. This training is an effective way of reducing the effects of fatigue. The focus is on optimising the available energy in order to be able to perform activities that you want to do or have to do, as satisfactorily as possible. Talk to your occupational therapist about energy management training.

Possible points of contact are:

- Your family doctor
- Neurologist
- Occupational therapist (www.ergotherapie.ch); physiotherapist (www.physioswiss.ch); neuropsychologist (www.neuropsych.ch)
- Fragile Suisse; patient organisation for people with brain injuries and their relatives

Tel. Helpline 0800 256 256

E-mail: helpline@fragilesuisse.ch

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