

Health & Fitness

Power Up

by Kylie James, CNP, & Joanne Smith, CNP

Fatigue is a common problem that affects millions of people each year. Fatigue can result in bad mood, difficulty in participating in daily activities, reduced motivation and irritability.

Fatigue is also very common in people with spinal-cord injury or disease (SCI/D) for a number of reasons including infections, spasticity, pain, sleeping problems, reduced respiratory function, poor diet and the level of exertion needed to perform basic tasks.



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Although there are numerous factors that can cause or contribute to fatigue one of the leading causes of fatigue in SCI/D is anemia.

CELL ENERGY

Anemia is a condition where blood has lower than normal red blood cells and this reduces the amount of oxygen available to your cells. As a result, your cells have less energy available to perform their normal functions and this leads you to feel tired.

Symptoms of anemia are often non-specific and often go unrecognized. Initial symptoms can include loss of appetite, constipation, headaches, irritability and difficulty concentrating. If the anemia goes undetected then symptoms can progress to weakness, fatigue, depression, dizziness,

overall paleness, cold extremities, pale and brittle nails, soreness in mouth, and for women, loss of libido and cessation of menstruation.

Maintaining a healthy diet and ensuring you consume appropriate levels of certain nutrients such as iron, vitamin C, B12 and folic acid can be one way to help address your symptoms and feel reenergized again.

There are a few things you can do with your diet to help boost your energy levels and address your anemia.

IRON & VITAMIN C

Iron is the mineral that helps make hemoglobin, the component of red blood cells that attaches oxygen and transports it around your body for energy.

Women and vegetarians tend to be at increased risk of low iron. This is because vegetarian sources of iron are less absorbed in the body than meat sources.

Consuming foods high in iron is extremely important. These foods include



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lean grass-fed beef, organ meats, dried sulfite-free apricots, spinach, prunes and scallops.

One way to increase the absorption of iron is to eat foods high in vitamin C. Foods high in vitamin C include broccoli, red and green peppers, papaya, pineapple and strawberries.

So, having a meal such as a spinach salad with strawberries or steak with steamed broccoli can help maximize your iron intake.

FOLIC ACID

The most common nutrient deficiency in the world is folic acid and up to 20% of individuals with SCI/D may be deficient in this nutrient.

Apricot Smoothie

This smoothie is packed with folic acid, vitamin C and iron.

Ingredients:

- 5 sulfite-free, dried apricots (the sulfite-free will be the dark brown/orange color)
- ½ cup of plain Greek yogurt
- 1 scoop of protein powder
- 1 handful of spinach
- 5 strawberries
- Water

Directions:

Put all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth and creamy.



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Folic acid helps the body produce healthy red blood cells, which is one of the keys to preventing anemia. The body has a hard time storing folic acid in large quantities, so regular consumption of foods high in it is recommended.

depression, mental confusion, memory impairments and coordination problems.

You can boost your B12 levels by eating foods high in this vitamin, such as calf's liver, sardines, venison, salmon, grass-fed beef, lamb and cod.

Removing sugar, refined carbohydrates and energy drinks from your diet can also help manage your energy levels.



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This includes spinach, romaine lettuce, cauliflower, asparagus, broccoli, navy and lima beans, chickpeas and lentils.

VITAMIN B12

Individuals with SCI/D are at greater risk of a B12 deficiency.

A deficiency in B12 is usually recognized at 220 pg/mL (picograms, equal to one trillionth of a gram, per milliliter) or lower for the able-bodied population. However, studies have suggested B12 levels for individuals with SCI/D shouldn't be lower than 350 pg/mL.

Vitamin B12 is a large molecule and can be difficult to break down and absorb into the body. Bacterial overgrowth and certain medications such as H2 blockers and proton pump inhibitors can also create vitamin B12 absorption problems (both are often used to treat things such as acid reflux disease and ulcers).

B12 anemia can exacerbate certain nervous system problems such as numbness and tingling in the arms and legs,

CUT IT OUT & ADD WATER

Adding or increasing the amount of the right foods in your diet is important, but so is what you take out.

Removing sugar, refined carbohydrates and energy drinks from your diet can also help manage your energy levels.

Consuming eight cups of water a day is also important. If you work out, you'll need to consume even more water.

If someone is 2% dehydrated (usually when you feel thirsty) you've already lost 25-35% of your energy levels. So

water consumption is a crucial piece in having sustained energy levels throughout the day.

Just making small changes to your diet can go a long way to boosting your energy levels and combating fatigue.



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For more information, visit eatwelllivewellwithsci.com.

Kylie James and Joanne Smith are co-authors of the book Eat Well Live Well with SCI and Other Neurological Conditions.

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