

Difficulty with everyday chores, even small ones

Feeling of no energy, feeling drained

Feeling of having no strength to do anything

Having trouble thinking, making decisions, remembering things

Breathlessness after light activity

Dizziness or light-headedness

Difficulty in sleeping

Loss of sex drive

Feeling more emotional than usual

Cutting down on social activities, which can lead to feeling isolated

Fatigue is both a physical and a mental symptom. It is highly variable from one person to the next. It can show itself immediately after the triggering event (such as overdoing things) or can be delayed by a couple of days.

It may also be accompanied by other symptoms such as increased pain, 'flu type feeling, joint pains etc. Like the fatigue of MS, that of arachnoiditis often doesn't go away after one night's rest. Generally it may take two or three days of rest to recover.

This is pathological fatigue.

Similarly, fatigue can be cumulative. One busy day may not be too much, but two or three in a row can be too taxing and lead to a bout of fatigue. Your chronic symptoms of pain, muscle spasms etc. are all likely to be worse during these periods of fatigue.

Also, mood may be low, and like anyone really tired, we tend to be more anxious, more irritable and emotional, and have difficulty thinking straight.

You may find that certain times of day are worse than others. Often mid-afternoon is a low point because of changes in hormone levels.

This is the same for healthy people, but for them it is much less of a problem. Going outside into the garden for some fresh air and bright light may help to banish unwanted sleepiness, or if necessary, a short nap can be taken (but if you are having problems with insomnia, this may be unwise).

You might discover that you are most fatigued when you haven't eaten for a few hours (more than three or four). This might be accompanied by feeling anxious, sweaty, headachy and generally unwell.

It might be linked to a low blood sugar, especially if you had a high sugar meal before, which

might have led your body to over-compensate. Try to avoid high sugar intake and opt instead for a more balanced carbohydrate intake to give a steadier blood sugar.

Similarly, if you drink a lot of coffee, you may be energised but only until the effect wears off, at which point you may feel rather drained. Drinking more coffee to counter this will only start the whole process off again.

In arachnoiditis, as in MS, many people have trouble coping with hot conditions, and may find that eg a hot bath makes their symptoms generally worse and in particular exacerbates fatigue. Avoidance of hot environments, and having prepared strategies for cooling off, may help to ensure that this is not a trigger for episodes of excessive weariness.

Secondary problems

Your family and friends may not realise the depth of your fatigue, and the way in which it can come upon you suddenly and be overwhelming. They may equate it to how they feel when they are tired, but it is in fact qualitatively quite different.

However, you can end up being thought of as lazy or trying to get out of activities unless the extent of the problem is realised. It is therefore important for family members (and friends) to learn about this aspect of arachnoiditis in order to avoid recriminations, arguments and misunderstandings, which can seriously undermine relationships.