

## 3.2 Post-Stroke Fatigue

There are many considerations that are crucial to promoting safety and optimizing recovery when working with people who have had a stroke. The TACLS Quick Reference Guides were developed from the TACLS resource and can be used as quick reference to help *support healthcare providers* and informal caregivers who may not typically work with and care for people who have had a stroke.

We recommend reviewing the full **TACLS resource** for more complete information:  
[strokebestpractices.ca/resources/professional-resources/tacsls](https://strokebestpractices.ca/resources/professional-resources/tacsls)

### Quick reference guide highlights

- **Always follow the current care plan for the person that you are working with.**
- **Post-stroke fatigue** is a common condition and can be experienced following a stroke at any point during the recovery process.
- The person may experience overwhelming tiredness, a lack of energy to perform daily activities, an abnormal need for naps or extended sleep, and tire more easily than pre-stroke.
- This fatigue does not necessarily improve with rest or sleep.
- It is often under-recognized and can negatively impact a person's ability to actively participate in rehabilitation, which has been associated with poorer long-term outcomes.
- It can occur in any person who has experienced a stroke and does not seem to be related to size, location, or severity of stroke.
- Post-stroke fatigue and motivation are not the same thing. A person can be extremely motivated to participate in all aspects of their recovery, but limited by the impacts of post-stroke fatigue.
- People who have experienced a stroke should be periodically screened for post-stroke fatigue and for medications and common and/or treatable post-stroke co-morbidities that are associated with and/or exacerbate fatigue (e.g., in acute care, primary care, home care, outpatient, stroke prevention and/or rehabilitation clinics).



### How you can help

- Follow the current care plan and recommendations of the occupational therapist and physiotherapist to help the person conserve energy, cope with fatigue and participate in recovery.
- Encourage people who are experiencing post-stroke fatigue to communicate energy status and rest needs to healthcare providers, family members, caregivers, employers, and social group.
- Consult with the stroke care team (e.g., physician, occupational therapist, physiotherapist) for strategies to support the person experiencing post-stroke fatigue. For example:
  - Structure the day to include a balance of activity and scheduled periods of rest; anticipate energy requirements for each task and for completion of high priority activities. Relearning how to complete daily activities takes a great deal of energy.

- Keep an agenda of daily activities and plan activities a day in advance. Plan higher energy activities following rest and plan quiet or restful activities following activities that need more energy.
- Organize the physical environment to minimize efforts to move around (e.g., reduce stair climbing, have easy access to the most frequently used items).
- Have the person sit rather than stand when possible when doing activities such as chores and personal hygiene (e.g., washing dishes, ironing, brushing teeth, showering).
- Teach the person to use appropriate body mechanics, posture and sitting positions, and rest locations (e.g., rest in bed, rather than in a chair).
- Establish good sleep hygiene patterns, avoid sedating drugs and excessive alcohol. Always follow the current care plan, including medication use.
- Encourage the use of energy saving equipment and technology to reduce physical efforts (e.g., electric can opener, online shopping).
- Plan vocational and leisure activities ahead of time to ensure the person is well-rested prior to their activities of choice.
- If possible, delegate activities that are low priority or can be done by someone else, such as family members, friends, or caregivers.
- Develop a plan for healthy diet and proper nutrition to help with energy levels.
- Plan and establish routines that reduce stress, and incorporate activities that support mental health (e.g., mindfulness).
- Physiotherapists can recommend appropriate exercise schedules and physical activities that are safe, of interest to the individual and can help restore energy and wellness.

**Note:** This information represents some of the priorities of care related to supporting energy conservation and post-stroke fatigue; consult with the stroke care team for any questions or concerns regarding post-stroke fatigue.

#### References:

1. Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations: [www.strokebestpractices.ca](http://www.strokebestpractices.ca), **Mood, Cognition and Fatigue following Stroke**, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Section 3
2. Taking Action for Optimal Community and Long-Term Stroke Care (TACLS) – **Post-Stroke Fatigue**
3. Evidence-Based Review of Stroke Rehabilitation – **Chapter 17 Medical Complications Post Stroke**

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