

Supporting Training Initiatives



# the otc treatment clinic

## Common conditions and their treatment options



This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by medicines counter assistants as part of their ongoing learning. Complete the questions at the end to include in your self-development portfolio



Welcome to *TM's* OTC Treatment Clinic series. This handy, four-page section is specially designed so that you can detach it from the magazine and keep it for future reference.

Each month, *TM* covers a different OTC treatment area to help you keep up-to-date with the latest product developments. In this issue, we focus on daily fatigue and stress. At the end of the module are multiple choice questions for you to complete, so your progress can be monitored by your pharmacist.

You can find out more in the *Counter Intelligence Plus* training guide.

The last six topics we have covered are:

- Dry skin and eczema
- Insomnia
- Coughs
- Topical pain relief
- Eye care
- Head lice

You can download previous modules from [www.tm-modules.co.uk](http://www.tm-modules.co.uk)

## module 213

# Daily fatigue and stress

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### for this module

**OBJECTIVES: After studying this module, assistants will:**

- Understand what is meant by the terms daily fatigue and stress
- Be aware that daily fatigue and stress are common complaints that can affect a person's health
- Be familiar with the possible causes of daily fatigue and stress
- Be able to recommend OTC products, when appropriate
- Understand how lifestyle changes may improve a person's ability to cope with daily fatigue and stress
- Be able to offer tips to improve a sufferer's sleep.

We all get tired from time to time and very few people can honestly say that they've never felt under pressure, either at work or at home. But how prevalent are daily fatigue and stress? Doctors now recognise that daily fatigue and stress can be detrimental to health and increase the risk of numerous conditions, including heart disease, digestive conditions, obesity, insomnia and depression.

Stress can be linked to many different factors in an individual's life, but work-related stress is particularly prevalent. According to the Stress Management Society, stress affects one in five of the working population and is the single biggest cause of sickness in the UK, with more than 105 million days lost to stress each year – costing UK

employers an astounding £1.24 billion.

The Government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises that stress in the workplace is a serious concern. In fact, the total number of work-related stress, depression or anxiety cases in 2013/14 amounted to 487,000 – 39 per cent of all work-related illnesses. On average, people suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety take 23 days off a year, which amounted to 11.3 million days in 2013/14.

Unfortunately, stress isn't always easy to monitor. However, it is possible for a person to address how they react to potentially stressful situations in order to minimise the impact.

By making healthy lifestyle choices, eating well, exercising regularly and getting plenty of sleep, we

## reflective exercise

Elaine, 45, asks for a product to help her sleep. She works as a delivery driver for a small company that has recently cut back on staff. Elaine is working overtime while also caring for her elderly mother, who lives two doors away. Elaine has recently split from her partner of 10 years.

### What would you recommend?

Elaine appears to be experiencing several stressful situations. It would be best to refer Elaine to the pharmacist in case she is suffering from a more serious concern such as anxiety or depression. The consultation should determine whether a GP referral is required before any sales are made.

To further help Elaine, encourage her to consider whether she could positively change her life in any way. Could she look for a new job? Are there any family members or neighbours who could help care for her mother? Could her mother have paid help or assistance from the local authority? If there is a large ageing population in your community, consider displaying information in the pharmacy on carers in the local area.

Also ask Elaine about her lifestyle habits – is she eating healthily? Suggest that she snacks on fruit or a handful of nuts while at work to avoid the temptation for fried, high sugar content food at service stations.

An OTC herbal therapy product may also help to relieve temporary insomnia (e.g. Kalms, Nytol, Potter's Nodoff).

### What if:

Elaine's 25-year-old son, John, is due to take his test to become a coach driver. Elaine tells you that John is a great driver but he is so anxious at the thought of failing the test that he is becoming unduly stressed.

Bach Rescue Remedy could be a good option for John. It is a well-liked product that many find useful during periods of stress and anxiety such as driving tests, exams or flying. It does not contain a sedative, which is essential for those planning on driving or operating machinery.

### What if:

Rachel, 20, comes to the pharmacy asking for a remedy for joint pain. During the conversation, she also mentions that she feels tired all the time, despite sleeping normally. Rachel hasn't felt like this before and is concerned about what is wrong with her, as well as how it may impact on her final university exams.

Check if Rachel has any other symptoms such as headaches, flu-like symptoms or a sore throat before referring her to the pharmacist. Rachel may be suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), which usually develops in people around her age and is more common in women than men. Rachel is likely to be experiencing stress as she is due to take exams. However, the above symptoms should still be checked by the pharmacist.

can do a great deal to help control how stress and fatigue affect our bodies.

This month's OTC Treatment Clinic looks at how you can help customers to overcome daily fatigue and stress by implementing practical self-care tips and using appropriate OTC products.

### What is daily fatigue?

Daily fatigue is a feeling of tiredness and exhaustion caused by stress, which can lead to a loss of energy. Fatigue is not the same thing as feeling sleepy – although a desire to take a nap can be a symptom. While they often vary between sufferers, symptoms of daily fatigue generally include:

- Lack of energy
- Feeling drained
- Feeling tired, even after a good night's sleep
- Lack of concentration
- Mid-afternoon energy dips

- Decreased performance at work
- Inability to continue with normal routine.

The above symptoms can affect many different areas of a sufferer's life, including reduced concentration at work, less energy to devote to friends and family, and a lack of motivation to exercise. So what causes daily fatigue? Again, actual causes may vary from one person to another, but common triggers can include:

- Lifestyle problems – e.g. poor sleeping habits, over-work, poor diet, lack of exercise
  - Psychological problems – e.g. depression, anxiety, trauma, grief
  - Medical conditions – fatigue may be a symptom of an underlying medical condition.
- Common conditions that can cause daily fatigue include anaemia; respiratory and circulatory problems; sleep apnoea; diabetes; obesity; glandular fever; and problems with the thyroid gland. Pregnant women also suffer

from fatigue, particularly during their first and third trimesters. In the majority of cases, fatigue can be resolved once the cause has been addressed.

### What is stress?

Stress is a normal reaction and it can be beneficial in many situations. For instance, a small amount of stress can improve a person's performance or focus. However, this all depends on the amount, duration and impact of the stress that someone is experiencing.

Stress is linked to what is commonly known as the 'fight or flight' mechanism. If a person is in danger, or if an emergency occurs, their body releases certain hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These trigger changes in the body to help it either face the danger (fight) or escape from it (flight). For example, heart rate and blood pressure increase, the body sweats more and blood is diverted to help power the major muscles. If the stressful situation is dealt with and goes away, hormone levels return to normal and the person no longer feels stressed. However, if the stress doesn't resolve, they may continue to feel anxious, jumpy and irritable. They may also find it difficult to concentrate and become increasingly emotional.

Everyone responds to stress differently and some handle it better than others. If stressful situations are constant, there will be detrimental effects over time. Long-term stress can increase an individual's susceptibility to numerous health problems, including heart disease, insomnia, digestive problems, depression and obesity.

### Causes and symptoms

We all recognise what short-term stress is – pressure at work, the kids getting sick, the in-laws springing a surprise visit. The good news is that these stressful situations tend to resolve relatively quickly. Long-term stress, on the other hand, is often caused by a change in a person's life, even if that change is positive (e.g. a promotion at work, getting married, moving to a new house). Other common examples of long-term stressful situations include:

- Relationship problems or divorce
- Illness or death of a loved one
- Caring for a sick relative
- Employment worries or job loss
- Financial difficulties.

The symptoms of stress are vast and varied:

- Mental symptoms – e.g. anxiety; depression; anger; behavioural changes; fatigue; difficulty concentrating; food cravings; mood swings; feeling teary or frustrated
- Physical symptoms – e.g. constipation or diarrhoea; muscle cramps; dizziness or feeling

## when to refer

Fatigue and tiredness are recognised symptoms of many medical conditions where referral is required. Refer anyone who reports long-term fatigue or tiredness alongside any of the following symptoms:

- Frequent illness, infection or wounds that don't heal as quickly as they should
- Loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss
- Excessive thirst
- Fever, sore throat or swollen glands
- Muscle or joint pain
- Headaches
- Night sweats
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty exercising
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Suspected sleep apnoea
- Suspected chronic fatigue syndrome.



Work-related stress is particularly prevalent – it affects one in five of the working population

faint; nervous twitches; sweating; difficulty sleeping; chest pains.

Long-term stress can also leave the immune system vulnerable to infections and other health problems. Learning how to manage stress can help improve mood, sleep, quality of life, health and wellbeing.

### Treatment

Stress and fatigue are treatable, but it's often not as simple as taking an analgesic for a headache or an antihistamine for hayfever. Instead, treating symptoms of stress and fatigue usually involves reviewing the sufferer's daily routine and lifestyle habits.

There are also OTC products that can treat the symptoms of daily fatigue (e.g. Pharmaton Capsules) and herbal remedies that may be useful for customers suffering from stress (e.g. Kalms Tablets, Potter's Newrelax, Quiet Life Tablets).

Herbal products can also be effective for treating temporary insomnia (e.g. Kalms Sleep, Kalms Night One-A-Night, Nytol Herbal Tablets, Potter's Nodoff Mixture, Potter's Nodoff Tablets).

The Bach Flower Remedies range offers products for emotional situations. Rescue Remedy is a popular combination that can be taken during periods of anxiety and stress.

Essential oils can also be used to help improve mood or aid relaxation and promote sleep. For fatigue and tiredness, grapefruit, basil, rosemary and eucalyptus are effective, while lavender, pine, eucalyptus or rosemary may help to ease anxiety, worry or work-related stress.

### Lifestyle advice

While it is not always possible to avoid tiring or stressful situations, lifestyle changes can help to reduce their effects:

- Get organised – write a to-do list and prioritise, dealing with the most pressing situations first. Be realistic about what you can achieve in a set amount of time
- Be prepared – whether its planning for an interview, making sure you know the way to an important meeting or simply packing enough toys to keep the kids entertained on a long journey, being prepared can help to avoid stressful, last minute panics
- Learn to say 'no' – this may sound simple, but it's surprising how difficult it can be to turn something down. Many people overestimate their limits so take on more than they can handle. Learning to say 'no' or how to delegate can make a big difference to stress levels
- Take time to relax – factor in a little 'me time' during the day. There are many ways to do this and they don't all require a lot of time. Deep breathing, a hot shower after work or a laugh with a good friend can all help to relieve stress
- Postpone change – change is stressful. If you don't need to redecorate the entire house two weeks before relatives visit, don't do it. Put it off until you can better handle the situation
- Get active – exercise is a great stress-buster as it releases feel-good chemicals in the brain that help to combat the effects of stress. It also relaxes muscles and aids restful sleep. Exercise doesn't have to mean hitting the treadmill at the gym, although running is a great way to

## the importance of good sleep

When a person is suffering from stress or fatigue, it is vital that they get sufficient good quality sleep. For those who find sleep hard to come by, pass on the following self care tips:

- Have a comfortable mattress and pillow
- Practise good sleep hygiene – check that the bedroom isn't too cold, stuffy, bright or noisy
- Use the bedroom only for sleeping – don't watch TV, make phone calls or check emails
- Go to bed only when tired – don't try and force sleep if you're wide awake
- If you don't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something else, such as reading a book
- Keep a notepad by the side of the bed to jot down things you need to remember
- Take a warm bath before going to bed. Add a few drops of soothing essential oils to the water – lavender or chamomile are good choices
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol for at least four hours before bed
- Exercise during the day rather than in the evening
- Don't take naps during the day
- Try to establish a regular sleep routine, even at weekends.

deal with stress. Anything that gets the body moving and increases the heart rate is beneficial. Why not try dancing or going for a walk or a bike ride with the family? Aim for about 2.5 hours (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (such as cycling or fast walking) a week

- Eat a healthy diet – opt for plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein. Avoid fatty, high sugar content foods. Limit caffeine and alcohol intake and drink plenty of water. Sugary snacks give a temporary energy boost that is quickly followed by a ‘crash’. For a pick-me-up, try a banana or a handful of nuts. Replace coffee and fizzy drinks with herbal teas and plenty of water
- Don’t skip meals – the body’s metabolism drops if we don’t eat regularly, leading to a slump in energy levels. Ideally, we should all aim to eat small meals every three to four hours. One of the most important meals of the day is breakfast. During sleep, the body’s metabolism slows right down, making breakfast necessary for an energy boost in the morning. Despite this, many people don’t make time to eat first thing
- Sleep well – most of us need between seven and nine hours of sleep in order to wake up feeling refreshed
- Talk things over – the saying ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’ has a lot of truth in it. Keeping worries and concerns bottled up inside can be stressful in itself. Sometimes simply talking to someone else about what’s bothering us can make us feel better. Other people may also be more understanding and accommodating if they realise what you’re

going through, or they may have encountered similar situations before and be able to offer advice or support

- Get help – if stress persists or worsens, seek medical advice. Prolonged stress can lead to serious mental health conditions like depression or anxiety. Don’t be afraid to speak to a doctor if feeling overwhelmed
- Identify the source – sources of stress are not always obvious. It may be worries about work deadlines. However, it may also be putting those deadlines off, rather than the work itself, that is the primary source of the stress. Identify sources of stress by looking closely at habits, attitudes and excuses (e.g. blaming stress on other people)
- Keep a stress journal – this can help to identify regular stress triggers and how you respond to them. As you log daily stress, patterns and common themes should become apparent. Write down the cause of the stress, how you felt (physically and emotionally), how you responded and what you did to make yourself feel better
- Think about how you cope – are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy? Helpful or unhelpful? For example, smoking, over- or under-eating, not exercising, procrastinating or taking stress out on others is not helpful or healthy.

**More information**

- The Stress Management Society: [www.stress.org.uk](http://www.stress.org.uk)
- NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/low-mood-stress-anxiety.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/low-mood-stress-anxiety.aspx)

## chronic fatigue syndrome

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) differs from daily fatigue. CFS is a condition that causes long-term tiredness, usually lasting six months or more. It affects everyday life and doesn’t resolve, even if the person gets extra sleep.

The medical name for CFS is myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and, according to NHS Choices, it affects around 250,000 people in the UK. While anyone may suffer, ME is more common in women than men, and usually develops in people in their early 20s to mid-40s. It has also been reported in children aged 13 to 15.

The exact cause of ME is unclear, but some experts believe it may be triggered by a viral infection. Others think there’s a link with depression, stress or a recent traumatic event.

As well as persistent fatigue symptoms, sufferers of CFS/ME may report:

- Insomnia
- Muscle and/or joint pain or inflammation
- Headaches
- Painful lymph nodes
- Sore throat and flu-like symptoms
- Dizziness
- Nausea.

If ME is suspected, refer the customer to the pharmacist.

## assessment questions: daily fatigue and stress

For each question, select one correct answer. Discuss your answers with your pharmacist.

**1. Which of the following statements about daily fatigue is TRUE?**

- a) Fatigue is a life-long condition that often cannot be resolved
- b) Fatigue typically affects pregnant women during their second and third trimester
- c) Daily fatigue is a feeling of tiredness and exhaustion caused by stress, which can lead to loss of energy
- d) Tiredness is the only symptom of fatigue

**2. Which of the following statements about stress is FALSE?**

- a) Stress is a normal response and can be beneficial
- b) Stress is linked to the ‘fight or flight’ mechanism
- c) If stress doesn’t resolve, individuals may feel anxious, jumpy and irritable
- d) Long-term stress is not associated with any health problems

**3. Which of the following is NOT a recognised physical symptom of stress?**

- a) Sweating
- b) Headaches
- c) Chest pains
- d) Constipation or diarrhoea

**4. Which of the following may NOT apply in the treatment of stress and fatigue?**

- a) Reviewing the sufferer’s daily routine and lifestyle habits
- b) OTC therapies to aid relaxation and promote sleep in short-term insomnia
- c) Waiting to allow symptoms to pass
- d) Essential oils to improve mood and relaxation

**5. Which of the following is a helpful lifestyle change for stress or fatigue?**

- a) Keep a stress journal to identify triggers
- b) Learn to manage stress by taking on more responsibilities
- c) Combat fatigue by increasing caffeine intake
- d) Never put off change; deal with it there and then

**6. Which of the following symptoms should be referred to the pharmacist?**

- a) Loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss
- b) Muscle or joint pain
- c) Night sweats
- d) All of the above