

Are you suffering from an energy crisis?

by Dr. Jeannette Birnbach,
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If you are a high-energy person stuck in a low-energy body, then you know how frustrating fatigue can be. Everything is more difficult, productivity goes out the window, and an unwanted reliance on stimulants like caffeine and sugar can begin. When the situation becomes chronic – lasting many weeks, months, or even years – it can also leave the sufferer



with feelings of hopelessness and depression.

If you or someone you care about is suffering from an energy crisis, please read on to learn about how the signs and symptoms of fatigue can be interpreted to point the way out. In a decade of clinical experience working largely with fatigue cases, I have yet to see the person who could not at least improve his or her health and energy.

Let's start with how your body creates energy to do work. Most people think that we burn carbohydrates, fat, and protein directly as fuel. An image that might come to mind is that these nutrients are like logs you can throw on a fire. This is not actually how it works.

We must convert food into ATP (adenosine triphosphate), the energy currency of the cell, before we can use it to fuel our bodies. This is similar to the way that oil contains the energy to run your car, but must first be turned into gasoline.

ATP is produced by a complex series of chemical reactions called the Krebs cycle. The Krebs cycle occurs in almost every cell of the body in the "powerhouse" called the mitochondria. Muscle and liver cells are hard workers in the body and require dozens and sometimes up to a hundred mitochondria per cell to meet their energy needs.

In each step of the Krebs cycle, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and other compounds

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are required to eventually produce ATP. If any of the necessary nutrients are missing, energy production is reduced.

If we are eating a decent diet, how is it possible that we might not be getting enough nutrition to supply the Krebs cycle and make ATP?

Whether or not we derive adequate nutrition from our food depends not just on what we eat, but on what we absorb. A poorly functioning digestive tract will absolutely have impaired absorption. Signs that the digestive tract is struggling include gas, bloating, heartburn/reflux, constipation, and so on. Although relief from symptoms is nice, medications that control symptoms do not in most cases restore the function of the intestines. As soon as you stop the medication, the symptoms are back. Better to have great digestive function, and not need the medications.

The digestive system uses ATP for the energy necessary to absorb nutrients. In the person with fatigue, a vicious circle starts in which lowered ATP production impairs the digestive system and in turn poor digestion deprives the Krebs cycle of the substances required for each step in ATP production.

The immune system makes its energy from the Krebs cycle, too. Research has shown that in the person with fatigue, the number of infection-fighting cells (white blood cells) is normal, but they move sluggishly and aren't able to fight infection efficiently. And the same problem starts again: a lowered ATP output deprives the immune system of energy so that infections have an easier time taking hold. And in turn, a body that needs to fight infections quickly uses up the reduced energy supply.

Why can't we just stop this vicious circle? The cumulative exposure to chemicals and

heavy metals, poor digestive function, immune system deficiencies and other factors become barriers to healing that can take some focused effort to overcome.

Let's look at barriers to healing a little closer.

You know that if you cut your hand, it will heal. If it does not heal, you would definitely want to know why. You would want to know what the barrier to healing was so that you could remove it. However, most people allow symptoms such as chronic allergies, poor digestion, skin problems, and frequent colds to continue without finding out why they occur. This is exactly the same as ignoring a cut that won't heal.

In any chronic condition, the barriers to healing are not always obvious because they do not have to be located at the sight of symptoms. For example, food allergies in the bowel can cause sinus congestion and headaches. Stress on the urinary tract can cause intestinal problems. Deficiencies of the vitamins that the cardiovascular system requires can cause sleep problems, and the list goes on.

Now let's talk about solutions for fatigue sufferers. If we accept that chronic fatigue has a cause, and that barriers to healing prevent or make it difficult to turn the situation around, what next?

Clinically, we have found that each person with fatigue is unique. That's why one solution doesn't work for everyone, and you can't just pick up a book with "the answer." But I do know from experience that there is a solution for each person. Many people find that removing these health-stealing stressors

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