



Tiredness – A Holistic Solution

Firstly, I am not a medic. Always check things out with your doctor or the NHS website if you're in any doubt.

It's important to distinguish between tiredness and fatigue:

Tiredness

Tiredness can often be alleviated by all those things we know we shouldn't do, like staying up too late, eating a large meal too late (which disrupts your digestion and prevents you sleeping properly), drinking alcohol or caffeine, or my personal favourite, scrolling on your phone. If so, you know what to do! You should see an improvement in a few days if you try these first.

Other top tips:

Eat regularly throughout the day – regular meals and healthy snacks rather than a big meal late at night. This keeps your energy levels stable through the day.

Exercise – actually, let's call it movement. Even if it's the last thing you want to do, just a 10 – 15 minute walk can give you energy. You don't have to sweat it out in the gym.

Lose weight – if you pick up a 1kg bag of sugar, it's heavy! Carrying that around with you all day would be exhausting, and if you're carrying extra weight on your body, that's exactly what you are doing. It also puts a strain on your heart, which makes you tired.

Cut out caffeine – this is recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and they say this should be done over a 3-week period to reduce headaches. Don't forget that caffeine is also in cola, energy drinks and even some painkillers, so the all in one headache tablet you're taking to reduce those headaches you get from not sleeping properly may actually be contributing to it, because it's replacing the caffeine you're trying to cut out.

Drink less alcohol – I recently did Sober October, and I was amazed at how much better I got at falling asleep, staying asleep and not having my actual sleep plagued by vivid dreams which woke me up, then because my heart was racing, couldn't get back to sleep again.

Drink more water – dehydration, even mildly, can make you tired.

Fatigue

This is more lifestyle-related, so let's check these out next. Of course, I would say that doing yoga, tai chi or meditation is good for you, but then I would! They are good for you, but what if you just can't drag yourself into your workout kit? Do any of these apply to you?

Couch potato – it's so tempting to binge Netflix on the weekend, but your body equates stillness with going to sleep, so try getting up and moving around (preferably not to the fridge again) or even just stretching. I'm not talking about yoga stretching, either; just have a really good stretch like you do first thing in the morning.

Poor posture – this was a new one on me. A surprising amount of energy goes on keeping you upright – basically anything that causes your spine to be out of alignment like hunching over the computer, slumping in your seat or doing that thing of cradling your phone between your shoulder and your ear means your muscles have to work harder to compensate.

Diet – crash dieting or eating sugary foods means that your blood sugar levels are peaking and crashing all over the place, confusing your metabolism and making your pancreas work overtime, which can lead to diabetes. Dietary supplements – sometimes, even with the best diet in the world, we're still deficient in some minerals and vitamins because of how our food is produced. Lots of evidence is emerging for the benefits of magnesium on energy levels, immunity and mood, especially in spray or lotion form which is generally easier on the tummy.

What about the pandemic?

Lots of our Sangha House members are reporting poorer mental health since Covid – be it increased anxiety and depression, fear of public spaces, getting irritable with others, powerlessness, or even just a feeling of being “over it” and wanting life to get back to normal. This is all totally understandable – I have a sense of “what now” when I turn on the news – and the first stage is to recognise that it's ok not to be ok. Dr Cerisa Parish from Johns Hopkins University in the United States identifies “pandemic fatigue” where the overwhelm sets in and burnout follows. It's because the things we're being asked to do, like wearing masks, social distancing and the rest is not what we're used to, and with anything new, it's tiring – remember starting your last new job? By the end of the first day, you were exhausted! She recommends really committing yourself to safety procedures, consciously practising it and making sure you have supplies, such as plenty of hand wash, masks, etc. Then you've got a plan of action, and almost a project.

But – what about your mental health? Such a major issue for people, and I've been referring our members to www.mentalhealth.org.uk, which identifies lots of situations and solutions for people, so do have a look at that. Fear and anxiety are a major cause of fatigue, so they recommend controlling what can be controlled and nothing else, pacing yourself, building up your tolerance by setting yourself mini-challenges regularly, varying your routines and talking to those at work if you feel safe to do so about your mental health. Talking to people you trust is absolutely vital, as is remembering the good stuff, even if it is really small, like finding a parking space more easily or finding a beautiful leaf on a walk, and focussing on the present – an old Buddhist technique is to focus on the time it takes to click your fingers and think, am I ok now? because mostly, you are!