

## Fatigue can be traced to many possible causes

Health matters

### A column

By VALERIE DeLAUNE

One of the most common health complaints in our society is fatigue. With the perception that we have to "do it all," some of us drive ourselves until we collapse in exhaustion. Sound familiar?

We work, play, raise children, take care of our domestic chores and often deprive ourselves of sleep in order to accomplish even the basics of life. Then we might down several cups of coffee or tea to be able to function through the next day. In time, this leads to a chronic pattern of fatigue and probably other health issues.

One of the first determinations the practitioner needs to make is whether the patient is actually suffering from low energy, or whether it is just the patient's perception that they should be able to do yet even more. For example, it may be normal to have lower energy for a time in the afternoon. In societies where siestas are practiced, employees are actually more productive. It is healthy to start winding down in the evening after a long day. People who push through their natural biorhythms end up not being able to sleep and burn up their energy reserves, until they can no longer function well or maybe even barely get out of bed.

Diet and poor eating habits are two of the main causes of fatigue. If the digestive function is weakened through irregular eating times, eating too much or too little, or eating too many hard-to-digest foods, you won't get the proper nutrition you need from foods. Even if you follow a healthy diet, it may be advisable to take a daily supplement to ensure you are getting everything you need. Eating disorders are exceptionally hard on the digestive system and unfortunately are all too common.

Overwork, either mental or physical, is another common cause of fatigue. Long hours, a stressful work environment, or standing for long periods of time uses up energy reserves and can lead to chronic tiredness. Physical overexertion from sports activities can also play a role in low energy.

In Chinese medicine, there are 22 diagnosis for fatigue, and often the patterns combine to make it even more complex.

Your practitioner will want to know when the fatigue is most pronounced, whether it can be alleviated with rest, your emotional state, whether it's better or worse with exercise, and how your digestive system is functioning. They will also want to know about excessive blood loss, especially during your menstrual cycle, your sleep patterns and whether you tend to be cold, among other

symptoms.

Often adequate rest is the only treatment required to restore energy. Acupuncture is very effective in treating fatigue, but the patient must be cautioned not to immediately burn up any new-found energy. Often people who tend to push themselves will do just that, which led to fatigue in the first place.

If you must work long hours, try to lay down and rest briefly sometime between 1 and 3 p.m. Eat at regular times, get mild exercise, and ensure you get adequate quantity and quality of sleep. Excessive consumption of sugar, alcohol, fats, caffeine and highly-processed foods deplete energy. Avoid things you suspect are allergens.

Fatigue can be an early symptom of diabetes, anemia, hypothyroidism, cancer, or other diseases, so be sure to see your doctor to rule out serious causes.

Valerie DeLaune, LAc, is an acupuncture and massage specialist in Juneau.