

## Fatigue and ALS

A common symptom of ALS is fatigue. Fatigue occurs in ALS patients because of decreased muscle strength—muscles affected by ALS become fatigued from normal use. In addition, the muscles used to compensate for weakened muscles can become fatigued from overuse. The ALS patient who has a weakened left leg will put more weight on the right leg, resulting in fatigue in both limbs.

Fatigue is more than feeling tired—it is often described as extreme exhaustion by ALS patients. **Energy conservation is the treatment for fatigue.** Principles of energy conservation include:

- Balancing rest and activity. Save your energy for things you enjoy doing.
- If someone is available to assist you with mundane tasks like cleaning, accept the help.
- Do not try to push through the fatigue – it will not make it easier the next time.
- Use Assistive Devices such as tub chairs, back scrubbers, thick-handled eating utensils, etc. An Occupational Therapist can determine what assistive devices would be best for you.
- Get a handicapped parking sticker. Your local department of motor vehicles and/or the ALS Chapter Social Worker has the form for this.
- Try to establish a regular sleeping pattern.
- Avoid stressful situations as much as possible. Stress is fatiguing. Find pleasant, relaxing activities that work for you and do them.
- Organize/prioritize/plan ahead.
- Use common sense. If you have trouble walking, don't resist getting a motorized wheelchair. If you have difficulty speaking and are having company in the evening, save your voice for when you want to be able to speak as well as possible.

Although in ALS you can't take away fatigue, by planning ahead you can still participate in activities you enjoy.