

Fatigue: Your Questions Answered

Everyone experiences brain injury differently. This is no “one normal” journey to recovery or a new normal.

Be kind to yourself and celebrate the small wins. Don’t be afraid to “nudge” symptoms.

How long can fatigue last?

- It's one of the most common, longest-lasting effects of brain injury - research shows it can still be present years later for some people.
- It usually eases gradually over time, not all at once.
- Still noticing it doesn't necessarily mean something's wrong - it can be a normal part of recovery.
- Talk to your GP or rehabilitation specialist - sleep, mood and workload can all play a part. You don’t need to manage on your own.

Can fatigue still improve after 5+ years?

- Yes - research shows it can keep easing well beyond five years.
- Ongoing pacing, coping, and rest habits — not just time — keep making the difference.

What does ‘rest’ actually mean?

- It's about reducing brain load before you're drained, not after.
- Notice recharging vs draining activities (napping, music, breathing = recharging; screens, reading, driving = draining).
- Sometimes walking in fresh air at the park can be restful for our brain. Rest for the brain and body are not always the same – lying on the sofa scrolling on your phone is not a rest for your brain.
- Break tasks into chunks; pace, don't crash.
- Keep naps to 20–30 minutes so they don't disrupt night sleep.
- Limit overstimulation - noise, bright lights and crowds all cost energy.
- Talk to your GP or specialist about your specific case.

Reading, emails or scrolling trigger my symptoms - what help is there?

- This is common - visual processing is often affected after brain injury.
- Ask your GP about a referral to an optometrist with neuro training.
- Vision therapy can help retrain tracking, focusing and eye coordination.
- Meanwhile: bigger text, anti-glare/blue-light filters, frequent screen breaks, and pacing near-work like any other task.
- Remember that scrolling is not rest for your brain.

Managing fatigue during recovery and getting back to work

- ACC-funded vocational rehab (Stay at Work / Back to Work) can support a gradual return. As well as a Return to Work plan, they can help you communicate with your manager about reasonable accommodations and how to support you back to work.
- Workplace adjustments — rest breaks, reduced hours, written instructions — are a legal right, not a favour.
- Headway can offer Workplace Training.

Is it normal to only manage one or two things before it all falls apart?

- Yes - very normal, and something our community describes often.
- Mental fatigue reflects real changes in brain processing, not low effort.
- Treat your energy like a budget: plan around it, don't push past it.
- It's okay to say no and protect your limits.

Need more support? Call us on 0800 Headway (432 3929) or visit headway.org.nz — you don't have to manage this alone.