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## MS Learn Online Feature Presentation

### MS Fatigue, part one Featuring: Dr. Benjamin Segal and Dr. Aliza Ben-Zacharia

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**Walt:** My word for fatigue with MS is I'm exhausted, and I'm exhausted all the time, and daily pretty much.

**Vito:** My body short-circuits and all of a sudden I can't function anymore.

**Trevis:** The worst is what I call lay down or fall down fatigue, when it's just all I can do to get to a place to lay down. I've taken two-hour naps on concrete floors before because that's as far as I could make it.

**Cheryl:** Do I experience fatigue. Fatigue. Fatigue is my middle name

**Cheryl:** It can be something as simple as just a general malaise, where my entire body just feels a little bit heavy. But it could also be as bad as the thought of even just getting up out of a chair and going to the bathroom, walking 10 feet to the bathroom just seems like such a huge chore.

**Lisa:** my MS fatigue feels like somebody has put a weight on me.

**>>Kate Milliken:** Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms in multiple sclerosis occurring in about 80% of those of us with MS. Fatigue can significantly interfere with a person's ability to function at home and at work and may be the most prominent symptom in a person who otherwise leads a normal life.

Hi, I'm Kate Milliken and welcome to MS Learn Online. Joining me to discuss this topic is Dr. Benjamin Segal. Dr. Segal directs the Multiple Sclerosis Center and is the Director of Neurology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Dr. Aliza Ben-

Zacharia is a Nurse Practitioner at the Corinne Goldsmith Dickinson Center for MS at the Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York City. Welcome to MS Learn Online.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Dr. Segal, there are many types of fatigue associated with MS. Tell us what they are.

>>**Dr. Benjamin Segal:** Fatigue is actually the most common symptom in multiple sclerosis, and it could take on many different forms. For example, patients with multiple sclerosis may experience motor fatigue, meaning that after they use a muscle repetitively, they become weak in that muscle.

Patients with MS also experience what's called lassitude, a general sense of exhaustion and it could be quite profound, preventing them from even carrying out simple tasks. We don't know exactly what causes lassitude. It's actually not correlated with lesion burden as detected on MRI scan, but it is very disabling. Some people believe that certain factors produced by the inflammatory cells that cause damage in multiple sclerosis may cause lassitude, but that is really not proven.

So, fatigue can also be a symptom of depression, which many patients with multiple sclerosis suffer from. In summary, there are different types of fatigue, there are different causes of fatigue, and multiple sclerosis patients are subject to many of them.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Nurse Practitioner Ben-Zacharia?

>>**Aliza Ben-Zacharia:** I agree, there are many types of fatigue. The most common fatigue that you see in an MS patient is complete exhaustion. Different than being tired daily, and that is because the biochemical changes in the brain. There are definitely related lesions in the brain that cause the signal not to go through. And sometimes because of the lesion, for example, when you are doing an activity you generate more effort to doing an activity and then it causes fatigue. It is more like even a cycle, if you look at it in a sense.

But other fatigue that's related to MS can be not sleeping well, because maybe you're going too often to the bathroom, or because you are taking too many medications that sedate you and make you weak during the day, and fatigue, like benzodiazepine, anticonvulsant medications. So, there are many medications that you use that you can have side effects and have fatigue related to them.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Why is fatigue so common? Do you have an opinion on this Dr. Segal?

**>>Dr. Benjamin Segal:** No one really knows why fatigue is common in multiple sclerosis. Some people have speculated that the inflammatory process that causes damage in multiple sclerosis leads to the release of certain chemicals that induce the fatigue. But we really do not know. It does not actually correlate with the degree of disability or the number of lesions someone has on their MRI scans, but it is a very profound and prevalent symptom of multiple sclerosis.

**Donna:** I have a lot of issues with fatigue with MS that includes depression, which is a very common condition, and just that bone deep tiredness that just -- I can't drag myself off the floor kind of tiredness that I get.

**Cermit:** I know one meeting I got called by my boss and his boss to go have a talk, and I said, "I can't make it up those stairs. We're going to have to do it down here in one of the other offices." They both understood and said fine and kicked out whoever owned that office and we sat there and had the talk there.

**Casey:** MS fatigue is very complicated sometimes. I have two small children, so raising them and trying to overcome the fatigue is often difficult, because I can't just stop and sleep when I want to.

**Lisa:** I've noticed my coordination goes, my mental abilities are fogged up.

**>>Kate Milliken:** Before treating fatigue, several factors need to be considered, so what are some of those considerations?

**>>Dr. Benjamin Segal:** Fatigue can be a direct consequence of multiple sclerosis itself, but it could also be caused by other conditions which may occur in the setting of multiple sclerosis. For example, patients who are depressed experience fatigue, and many patients with multiple sclerosis do experience depression at some point in their clinical course. So, depression needs to be addressed as a possibility.

In addition, other conditions, medical conditions, such as low thyroid hormone or anemia could cause fatigue, and those should not be disregarded in a patient with multiple sclerosis who complains of being tired.

Conditions such as sleep apnea, which cause fatigue in the general population, also occur in MS. That is disordered breathing that occurs when people are sleeping and can be addressed with certain interventions, such as a CPAP machine.

So, it's important to look at all these different causes, because they have different treatments than the fatigue -- than the treatments used for the fatigue associated with

multiple sclerosis itself. The fatigue associated with multiple sclerosis itself is often referred to as lassitude, and that can be addressed with different medications, as well as alternative measures.

>>**Kate Milliken:** Nurse Practitioner Ben-Zacharia, before treating fatigue, several factors need to be considered. So, what are some of these considerations?

>>**Aliza Ben-Zacharia:** Important to assess what patients on, really. First take a thorough history, what they're doing. Even simply enough, what's their lifestyle issues. Do they drink too much coffee or alcohol at night? Some things you can do very, very easily. But you want to really do a thorough evaluation of their medication, their illness, their fatigue. What time of the day they are fatigued, their sleep pattern. Anything that can somewhat interfere with becoming fatigued throughout the day. So, you want to do that evaluation.

Then you can manage it with non-pharmacological agent and pharmaceutical agent. My rule of thumb is always to start with something that is not medication. Patients sometimes tend to be on too many medications. It's not healthy. Polypharmacy is not ever healthy, because medications interact with each other.

>>**Kate Milliken:** A lot of important information about a relevant symptom in MS. We'd like to thank Dr. Benjamin Segal and Dr. Aliza Ben-Zacharia for joining us and offering their perspectives on fatigue. If you'd like to learn about fatigue or other MS symptoms or if you'd like to get more information on living with MS please go to [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org) . For MS Learn Online, I'm Kate Milliken thank you for joining us.