- Sleep / Rest

# Surprise reason why you're always tired

## When constant weariness has become your default mode, it could be down to more than just poor sleep, discovers Lucy Gornall

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So many of us struggle to keep our eyes open during the day, counting the hours until bedtime. In fact one in four of us admits to feeling tired 25% of the time, and more than half of workers take time off due to fatigue, research by The Sleep Charity has revealed.



Yes, it could be down to poor sleep, but if you think you're getting enough shuteye but still feel weary, it might be worth seeing if other factors are at play.

You never stop: Without time to rest and recharge, your body and mind stay in a heightened "alert" state, which gradually drains your energy, even if you don't consciously notice it, according to GP Dr Babak Ashrafi, of Superdrug Online Doctor.

"Over time, this can lead to burnout. Your brain can only handle so much continuous stimulation before it reaches its limit."

Setting clear boundaries is essential and separating work from personal time is key.

"Avoid checking emails or work messages after work and set a firm 'stop time' for transitioning from work mode to personal time," says Dr Ashrafi.

If you're shouldering a lot of household, family, or work-related responsibilities, ask for help and share the load with others.

"Scheduling actual rest, whether through breaks, naps or simply time off, ensures you get adequate recovery. Treat rest like an important meeting," adds Dr Ashrafi.

You've a nutrient deficiency:
Three of the most common nutrient deficiencies in the UK are vitamin D, vitamin B12 and iron, according to Registered Nutritionist, Claire Hitchen.
"All of these can result in various symptoms, including tiredness."
Claire says that low vitamin D levels can affect sleep.
"Without enough vitamin D, we risk poor bone and muscle strength too, which can lead to tiredness."
She adds: "Vitamin B12, known as the energy vitamin, helps fuel the body's cells. It's also essential for brain health and development. One of the main symptoms for vitamin B12 deficiency is extreme fatigue."
Deficiency of B12 is more common in vegetarians and vegans, due to a lack of natural plant food sources.
Low iron can have an impact too, because our red blood cells transport oxygen around the body.
"Low iron can mean your muscles and tissues aren't getting enough oxygen to function properly, leading to tiredness. Low iron levels and iron deficiency are more common in women who are menstruating, particularly those who have heavy bleeding," says Claire.
If you are feeling tired all the time and it's affecting your daily life for no
obvious reason, then speak to your GP or a qualified nutritionist and get it checked out.
"You will be able to get a blood test (a full blood count) and check your levels of these core nutrients: vitamin D, vitamin B12 and iron. If your levels are suboptimal or you have a deficiency, you'll be recommended to take targeted supplements, alongside dietary advice for specific nutrient-rich foods," says Claire.
Too much screen time: Whether it's a laptop, phone or the TV, it's hard to avoid the glare of screens.
"The effects of screen time on tiredness vary depending on when and how you're using screens throughout the day," says Dr Ashrafi.
"If you wake up and check your phone straight away, this can negatively affect your circadian rhythm, aka your natural sleep-wake cycle.
"Screens emit blue light, which suppresses melatonin production, the hormone that helps you fall asleep."
Despite it being the morning, this can impact your sleep in the evening.
In the afternoon, you experience a natural energy slump at around 3pm.
But prolonged screen time during the day can exacerbate this and strain your eyes, contributing to increased fatigue, says Dr Ashrafi.
"In the evening, blue light from screens disrupts melatonin production again, making it harder to fall asleep, leaving you more tired the next day," he adds.
What you view on your screen can also leave you tired.
"Negative stories, controversial topics, information overload, or the comparison game on social media causes your brain to work overtime, triggering an increase in cortisol (the stress hormone), which drains energy," says Dr Ashrafi.
Avoid looking at screens within the first 30 minutes of waking and within an hour of going to bed.
During the day, try the 20-20-20 rule to give your eyes a break. Look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.
It's a hormone imbalance:
Both men and women can experience tiredness from unbalanced hormones. "For men, low testosterone levels, caused by age, high body weight, stress, high alcohol intake, a poor diet or some medications, are linked with lower energy levels," says Claire.
For women, hormones naturally fluctuate throughout the monthly menstrual cycle.

"Higher levels of progesterone and lower levels of oestrogen the week before your period (the luteal phase) can make you feel more drowsy," says Claire.
Depending on how long your luteal phase is, this tiredness can last for a couple of weeks.
"Perimenopause, which usually begins in a woman's 40s, also causes the body to produce less oestrogen, leaving you feeling tired. It can also affect sleep," adds Claire. Hypothyroidism, where your thyroid gland doesn't produce enough hormones, can lead to tiredness too, as well as weight gain and feeling depressed. Worried?
"Your GP should be able to arrange hormone testing to check your levels of these hormones. If they don't, ask for a referral to a specialist," says Claire.
Your gut is unhealthy: The gut is where we absorb nutrients essential for energy, such as iron and B vitamins.
"If the gut is not in great shape, nutrient absorption can suffer and excess inflammation may creep in, causing fatigue and other symptoms," explains dietitian Dr Emily Leeming.
Research has also linked the gut microbiome – the collection of trillions of bacteria that reside in your gut – with the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, GABA (GammaAminobutyric Acid) and dopamine.
"These affect mood, sleep and energy, so an unhappy gut can leave you feeling flat," says Dr Leeming.
Signs of an unhealthy gut include bloating, constipation and diarrhoea as well as feeling mentally foggy. Fibre-rich foods offer gut support. "Aim for at least 30g of fibre a day. Whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds tend to be more packed with fibre than most fruits and vegetables, but every little counts," adds Dr Leeming.
Half a can of beans contains 8g of fibre, 2tbsp of chia seeds packs in 5g and 100g of 85% dark chocolate contains 11g of fibre.
Sleep, exercise, and managing stress levels also make a big difference to your gut health.
You're on a blood sugar rollercoaster:
Your breakfast choice can either help or hinder your energy. High-sugar and refined carbs, such as cereal, pastries and white toast, are the worst offenders.
Claire says that these "naked" carbs, such as toast or cereal on their own, lead to a quick spike in blood sugar followed by a crash.
"When your body experiences a rapid blood sugar spike, the pancreas releases a large amount of the hormone insulin to lower these high glucose levels. But, excess insulin can drop blood sugar too low, which causes tiredness and cravings for more sugar and carbs. So the cycle starts again."
Transform your breakfast into a balanced meal of carbs, protein and fats to reduce blood sugar spikes.
"Go for whole milk (not skimmed) and add nuts, seeds, Greek yogurt and possibly protein powder to cereal or porridge. Top toast with eggs or smoked salmon and avocado," says Claire.
You're skipping lunch:
Even after a balanced breakfast, skipping lunch may cause your blood sugar levels to drop too, causing the afternoon slump. "Plus, without adequate calories, your body can go into starvation mode, meaning it tries to conserve energy and slows down all its functions," says Claire.
Enjoy a balanced lunch, aiming for 30g of protein.
"It gives you longer-lasting energy and helps stabilise your blood sugar levels," says Claire.
You could add half a chicken breast to your sandwich or top your jacket potato with a cup of protein-rich cottage cheese or beans.
'' You will be able to get a full blood test and check your levels of core nutrients