



VESTIBULAR

DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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Tips on Increasing Your Activity Level & Managing Fatigue

By Claire Haddad, Boston Area Support Group Leader

1. Know your energy level: how much energy do you have on a typical day?

Some people may have a relatively stable energy level while others may find that it fluctuates within a range based on weather changes, allergies, diet (influences of salt, alcohol, caffeine, etc.) and even unknown factors. Some may have a “good day energy level” and a “poor day energy level.”

Understanding one's limits is the best way to maximize your energy. **The key to feeling well on most days is to make sure your activity level does not exceed your energy level.**

2. Know what depletes your energy: how do you avoid the energy zappers?

Many people experience increased vestibular symptoms (e.g. dizziness, brain fog, sensation of movement, visual disturbances, etc.) when they are exposed to a lot of stimulation. These situations might include: going to the shopping mall, the grocery store or a crowded/loud restaurant, or looking at busy environments such as patterned carpets, venetian blinds, windshield wipers, ceiling fans, passing cars, fluorescent lights, etc.

While you don't want to isolate yourself, there are some activities that aren't worth zapping your energy, especially if you are trying to accomplish something that is more important. For example, shopping online is a good alternative to going to the shopping mall. If you must go shopping, pick a time when the mall is not so busy, either when it opens in the morning or just before closing at night.

3. How to conserve energy: Plan your day/week well.

It sounds simple: planning your activities is key to staying within your energy level. “Pushing through” each day beyond your energy level will likely overwhelm you and lead to increased symptoms with longer recovery times.



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Determine the best time of the day to complete activities. Some people feel better in the mornings when they are fresh, others feel better in the afternoons once they've been up for a while and have acclimated to being upright against gravity. Schedule activities during that part of the day when you feel strongest.

A big project might seem overwhelming, so break it down into more manageable pieces. For example, cleaning your house in preparation for a house guest is something that can be done gradually. The best way to accomplish it is to break it down into segments and plan to clean one room each day. In terms of routine household management, you might share certain household chores with your partner/spouse taking on some of the more physically challenging or stimulating ones.

If you work, organize yourself the night before (lay out clothing, put car keys in a central place, make a lunch) to minimize running around in the morning and zapping your energy before you even get out the door.

4. How to restore energy: pull back when you've overdone it.

Even before you bump up against your energy limit, take short, restorative breaks, such as lying down and listening to music or meditating for 15 minutes. Do not watch TV – it is a stimulating activity. If you work, periodically go to the restroom just to take a “rest.”

5. Extra energy for a special event

Going to a very challenging/unusual event requires special planning. Never plan an activity for which you do not have an exit plan. Make certain that you can leave or quit if you become overwhelmed; take breaks at a restroom or quiet side room.

If you have to go to a challenging event (e.g. going to the airport, a wedding, a large party, etc.), many people benefit from resting very well the day before and allowing plenty of time for recovery the following day.

In her book, *Finding Balance: Healing From a Decade of Vestibular Disorders* (www.findingbalancebook.com), author Sue Hickey provides the following advice from a nurse about negotiating crowds better: wear comfortable shoes, place your feet wide apart, hold onto a seat or the wall, close your eyes to give yourself a break, and rest before going into the challenging crowd situation (page 144).

Consider using assistive devices when out of the house or when going to



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challenging situations. Some people use a 'Relief Band' to control nausea. The more effective Relief Band sends a small electrical current to the wrist (about \$170; refer to: www.seasicknessreliefband.com); the cheaper magnetic ones (\$10) may not be very effective. You may also want to use a cane or Nordic walking poles to provide support.

6. How to increase your energy level: increasing tolerances and endurance

Strengthening your vestibular system may allow you to better tolerate the situations that exacerbate symptoms and deplete energy. If it has been recommended that you do vestibular exercises, try to complete them at least 3-5 times weekly to increase your tolerances and endurance. Walking is a good vestibular rehab and keeps the muscular-skeletal system strong.

Many physical therapists have started to incorporate the the Wii Fit (an interactive video game) to strengthen balance. You can begin these activities slowly to increase strength, endurance, balance, eye-foot coordination and reaction times. Tai Chi is another physical exercise that has been shown to improve balance. If you can't get to a class Dr. Timothy Hain sells a DVD for home use (visit his website at <http://www.dizziness-and-balance.com/taichi/default.htm>).

Make sure to eat a balanced diet and drink lots of water for hydration; reduce/avoid caffeine and alcohol.

7. How to increase your energy level/reduce stress with alternative therapies

Alternative therapies, such as acupuncture, reiki (energy healing), and cranial sacral work (done by a chiropractor) may reduce stress levels and even improve vestibular symptoms. With fewer symptoms people generally feel an energy increase or can tolerate stimuli better. Not every therapy may have an effect and you may have to do them frequently (~ 6-8 sessions in 2-3 months) to have a noticeable effect.

8. Other energy drains: vision trouble and sleep difficulties.

People with vestibular disorders often become more dependent on their eyes for balance. As a result, any problems with vision will exacerbate vestibular problems and add to the energy drain. Make sure to have your eyes checked regularly. If you believe vision issues are contributing to your vestibular problems consider seeing a



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behavioral optometrist, even if your vision is fine. Also, any sleep difficulty (e.g. insomnia, sleep apnea etc.) that prevents a restful, restorative night sleep should be investigated.

9. Clarify your energy level: Keep a diary

Keep a diary for a month and document your **activity level** and your **energy level** each day. Is your activity level exceeding your energy level? What can you change? If your symptoms are particularly influenced by diet (especially Meniere's Disease), then track your diet as well.

Sue Hickey's book *Finding Balance* is the best example of someone who successfully kept a diary, not only to better manage her energy level but to discuss her symptoms with her doctor. This resulted in better treatment and outcomes.

10. Explain your energy limits to friends and family

Talk to family members and friends about how you are trying to increase your activity level when possible. You may want to be more social, but you know you risk disappointing them if you have to cancel on them as a result of increased symptoms. By educating your friends and family about vestibular disorders and the unpredictable nature of symptoms you can help them understand the challenges you are facing and reduce their frustration at changes that impact them. Refer them to the Vestibular Disorders Association's website at <https://vestibular.org> for more information on the symptoms and impacts of a vestibular disorder and/or download free articles from the website to pass on to them. You may also want to invite them to attend a support group meeting with you to get to know other people with vestibular problems and hear in their own words how their lives are affected by them.