



I'M TIRED. IS THIS NORMAL?

At least once a day, a patient asks me, “Is this normal?” Generally, the question follows a laundry list of symptoms, which can be anything from mild to severe. As a naturopathic physician who treats the whole person with an individualized treatment program, it is my job to give the patient a sense of why their symptoms may be occurring and why they are not “normal.” In our busy society, where most adults are functioning with less-than-ideal health, it is no wonder that we consider symptoms of fatigue, depression, anxiety, menstrual irregularities, and weight gain, among others, as “normal.” While these issues may be common, they are not normal, meaning that they are not a part of optimal physiological function of the body and mind.

“I’m a mom, I’m just tired,” is commonly heard from female patients who sit on my couch during an appointment. Perhaps the fatigue began after the birth of their first baby, during the first few months of night-feeding and constant care of an infant. Often, the fatigue began before pregnancy, meaning that the woman’s energy reserves were tapped before the extra stress of pregnancy, birth, and caring for a new baby. Is this common? Absolutely. Is it normal? Absolutely not! Our adrenal glands, which produce cortisol among other things, are our energetic reserve. They assist us in mustering the energy and strength to get through stressful times, and then help us to rest and repair once the stress dissipates. In modern life, it seems the stress never dissipates! Our adrenal glands and our nervous system become taxed to the point of exhaustion. Thus, the majority of my adult patients list fatigue as one of their symptoms.

Unwinding the cause of fatigue is not easy. There are many factors at play, and decades of life lived at high velocity cannot be un-done in one naturopathic medical visit. I often begin treatment by ordering some lab testing so that I know exactly what I am treating. Testing may include salivary hormone levels, a complete blood count, a comprehensive metabolic panel, lipids, thyroid, iron stores, and Vit D levels. Fatigue feels the same no matter the cause, but as a naturopathic physician, my goal is to treat the cause. In addition to lab testing, a discussion of diet and exercise habits, toxic exposures, and health history will give me clues about how to proceed in treatment. Once these tests results are received and analyzed, I begin patients on an individualized plan that treats the causes of their fatigue.

There is hope for the chronically tired. You did not get here over night, and it will take some time to regain energy and stamina. You may need to change some things about your routine – going to bed earlier, good sleep habits, and a nourishing diet are crucial to success. Over time and with the proper treatment, your energy will increase and you will find that you have more than enough stamina to get through the day.