

Preface

After many years of working with issues related to fatigue both clinically and in research, it has become clear how little we have progressed in our theoretical and applied understanding of fatigue and its impact on persons' lives. Even its definition was ubiquitous, unclear, and equivocal. How could we feel we could treat a symptom without a clear understanding of what it is? Some see the presence of fatigue as a major symptom of a psychiatric illness, while others see it as the result of damage to the brain. Still others view fatigue not as a symptom but as an illness. What do we really know about fatigue? Today, we face the same questions first asked after more than 100 years of scientific inquiry.

This book can by no means address the varied and broad questions we need answered regarding the enigma of fatigue. Rather the purpose of this book is specific: to answer the question what does the presence of fatigue tell us about how the brain works? More specifically, what are the neural mechanisms associated with fatigue? Experts from a wide variety of conditions that result in fatigue have shared what they know about fatigue and the brain. We hope that bringing such experts together in a single volume will uncover some pattern(s) to form hypotheses that can drive future research in our quest to understand the underlying causes of fatigue.

This book is divided into six parts. The first part discusses the nature of fatigue. It includes a chapter on the history of fatigue and its epidemiology. A second chapter presents information on assessing and measuring fatigue. The final chapter in this section discusses the issue of cognitive fatigue, its measurement and interpretation.

Part II discusses specific neurological conditions that produce fatigue as a symptom. It includes chapters on multiple sclerosis, stroke, traumatic brain injury, and a more general chapter on other neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, dementia, and Lyme's disease.

Part III covers psychiatric conditions in which fatigue is a major symptom. Beginning with a historical overview of fatigue in psychiatry, this section presents chapters on chronic fatigue syndrome, depression, and somatization.

Part IV includes chapters on general medical conditions in which fatigue is a major symptom. These include HIV, sleep disorders, heart disease and cardiovascular dysfunction, autoimmune disorders such as systemic lupus erythematosus, and cancer. A chapter on the emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology and fatigue is also provided.

Part V consists of a single chapter on the treatment of fatigue. While individual chapters in sections III and IV also include information on treatment specific to particular disorders, this chapter provides a broad overview of treatment approaches to fatigue.

Finally, part VI attempts to integrate what has been learned from the previous chapters. The goal of this final chapter is to provide an overall definition of fatigue, explore the brain mechanism that appears to be responsible for “primary” fatigue, and suggest future research and investigation.

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