

# Managing Fatigue as a Parent

If you're a parent, I can almost guarantee you're tired. Parenthood and fatigue seem inseparable. Infants and toddlers amplify our tiredness, but regardless of their age, raising children is tiring. (The impact of COVID, economic insecurity, and general life stress from recent years exacerbate this feeling).

It's tempting to see our parental exhaustion as a moral failing. We are worse parents when we are tired. We parent better when we feel alive and vital. But life conspires against us.

We'll never beat fatigue completely. The daily grind combines with ageing to ensure we'll be tired every day. It just happens faster with kids than without them! But we misunderstand two things about this exhaustion.

The first is that much of our tiredness is firmly within our control; it comes down to choices (with the exception of parenting young children who genuinely require us at ALL hours and remove a lot of choice for attentive and involved parents).

The second is that we think we have no way around our fatigue, whereas the truth is that we may not have learned better strategies to reduce our exhaustion.

We're also afraid... of change. What if we make a change and we're less tired, but that change requires us to sacrifice something we really like in our lives?

If we do have more control than we realise, and if strategies do exist, then there is value in making the attempt to reduce fatigue. The following three solutions feel kind of sucky because they're so obvious, but they work.

## Solution 1

### Sleep: The Ultimate Recharge

Sleep is non-negotiable, but so many of us treat it like a luxury item. Get real about sleep (unless you are dealing with a baby or toddler) by:

- Switching off screens (no streaming, no socials, no games) at least 30 minutes before bed.
- Focusing on reading or connecting with your partner before sleep. (Sex is great for enhancing exhaustion. Some people get tired just hearing it's a possibility! Others get tired right after it.)

- Shooting for a solid 7+ hours each night (recognising some people need up to 9).
- Waking up early enough to be tired at night.
- Staying off the coffee, sweets, and alcohol, particularly in the afternoon and evening.

## Solution 2

### Diet: Fueling the Body

Quick, sugary snacks and convenience foods exacerbate fatigue (and inflammation). It sounds boring, but:

- Minimise drinking anything other than water (and drink plenty of it).
- Increase your vegetable intake for snacks and at meals.
- Grab a handful of nuts rather than sweets when you need a snack.
- Prep well-loved, nutritious meals in batches on the weekend to minimise stress on busy nights.
- Set up a routine where you have the same meals each week or fortnight to minimise cognitive load. Eg: Monday is Mediterranean, Tuesday is Tacos (Mexican), Wednesday is a one-pot solution, Thursday is Pizza, Friday is Fish, Saturday is BBQ, and Sunday is leftovers (or a roast).

## Solution 3

### Attention Management: Be Present

Multi-tasking is both exhausting and inefficient. Focus on one thing. Do it well. Be present. Engage. When complete, move on.

Your energy flows where your attention goes. Putting attention on too many things pushes energy in too many directions. Be clear on your focus. Direct your energy. Watch your productivity increase while your exhaustion drops.

Parenting requirements shift from moment to moment, day to day, and week to week. But improved sleep habits, better systems, and clearer focus will increase your balance and allow you more time and energy to spend on what (and who) matters most—your family.



**AUTHOR**

**Dr Justin Coulson**

Dr Justin Coulson is a dad to 6 daughters and grandfather to 1 granddaughter. He is the parenting expert and co-host of Channel Nine's Parental Guidance, and he and his wife host Australia's #1 podcast for parents and family: The Happy Families Podcast. He has written 9 books about families and parenting. For further details visit [happyfamilies.com.au](http://happyfamilies.com.au).