

MANAGING LISTENING-RELATED FATIGUE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

To date, no research is available on systematic intervention strategies for alleviating the effects of listening-related fatigue; however, we have gathered information and insight through our work to develop the Vanderbilt Fatigue Scales. This handout summarizes suggested coping strategies obtained during focus groups and interviews¹ as well as professional recommendations for management of listening-related fatigue². The following strategies are recommended in addition to completing the VFS-Peds questionnaires found at www.vumc.org/vfs.

COMPLETE OBSERVATIONS AND STUDENT INTERVIEWS

- Observe the student in their typical listening and learning environments, including the classroom, gymnasium, cafeteria, and during group interactions to determine if specific situations or locations are more fatiguing.
- Discuss challenging listening situations with the student to understand their day-to-day experiences (if any) with fatigue.

OPTIMIZE THE LISTENING ENVIRONMENT

- Minimize background noise and reverberation with acoustical treatments (e.g., curtains, carpeting) and turning off noisy equipment (e.g., air conditioning units) when possible.
- Reduce visual distractions (e.g., other students or cluttered spaces).
- Use good communication skills when speaking to the student. Ensure the child has good visual access to the speaker's face and is close to them to reduce challenges of listening at a distance.

ENSURE CONSISTENT AMPLIFICATION USE

- Verify the student's amplification (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, bone anchored devices, remote microphone systems) are fit according to prescriptive targets and are functioning appropriately.
- Consistent use of amplification should be the gold standard; however, sustained listening through a device can be fatiguing for some children and a break from device use may be needed (see accommodations section below).

PROVIDE ACCOMMODATIONS

- Allow the student to use preferential, flexible seating for optimal visual and auditory access during all educational activities.
- Provide listening breaks—time where the student is permitted to take a break from attentive listening in the classroom, particularly after a period of difficult listening. Examples include taking a short movement break like standing and stretching or going to the restroom or for a water break. Alternatively, the child may take a break from work while remaining at their desk and/or remove their hearing assistive technology (e.g., hearing aid, cochlear implant) for a short period of time. This recommendation is individualized based on the student's needs and responsibility level.

CONSIDER THE DAILY SCHEDULE

- Schedule potentially fatiguing, auditory-heavy tasks (e.g., speech-language therapy) or classroom activities (e.g., listening to lectures or group discussions) at a time when the child is less likely to become fatigued. Many teachers reported scheduling these activities in the morning resulted in less fatigue.

COUNSEL AND EDUCATE OTHERS

- **Counsel students:** some students struggled to understand the concept of listening-related fatigue or identify that their fatigue was associated with challenging listening situations. Discuss difficult listening situations and settings, as well as fatigue-associated difficulties and strategies with your students. Consider action plans for requesting interventions as needed to develop self-advocacy skills.
- **Counsel parents:** inform parents about the signs, and possible negative effects, of listening-related fatigue. Provide strategies and suggestions for at-home management if fatigue is experienced, such as rest breaks or amplification breaks.
- **Educate other professionals:** teach others (e.g., educators, school service providers, administrators) about the signs of, and possible negative effect, of listening-related fatigue. Engage in multidisciplinary collaboration by using a team approach to enact appropriate intervention and management plans tailored for each student.

References

¹Davis, H., Schlundt, D., Bonnet, K., Camarata, S., Hornsby, B., & Bess, F. H. (2021). Listening-related fatigue in children with hearing loss: Perspectives of children, parents, and School Professionals. *American Journal of Audiology, 30*(4), 929–940. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_aja-20-00216

²Hornsby, B. W. Y., Davis, H., & Bess, F. H. (2021). The impact and management of listening-related fatigue in children with hearing loss. *Otolaryngologic Clinics of North America, 54*(6), 1231–1239. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.otc.2021.07.001>