

Ten Ways to Be Tired in Russian

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Устал: I'm beat

One of the weird aspects of life in 2020 — being in quarantine, coming out of quarantine but still being careful, working at home, not going anywhere, never hitting 10,000 steps, not going to the fitness club, doing nothing — is being exhausted. For me, the first half of the year is summed up in one word: Устала (I'm tired.)

If you think about it, the word itself is a little weird, too. Устал (for a man) and устала (for a woman) are not adjectives, but the past tense of the perfective verb устать. If in the past you used to get tired in your go-to-work job, you could use the imperfective verb уставать and say уставал/уставала (I used to get tired).

And the verb itself is a bit weird, formed by the prefix у — here a form of negation — and

ставать/стать (to stand). So being tired in Russian is basically “can’t stand.” At least that part makes sense.

You can intensify the fatigue factor with a variety of adverbs, declaring yourself to be адски (hellishly); дико (wildly); жутко (terribly); зверски (savagely); страшно (awfully) or смертельно (fatally) устал (tired).

Or you can say Устала (I’m tired) + до (to the point of) and add some nouns. These get translated in various ways: устал до невозможности (I’m so tired I can’t take it anymore); устал до полусмерти (I so tired, I’m half-dead); устал до потери сознания (I’m so tired I could faint); устал до предела (I’ve hit the wall, I’m so tired).

Now the thing is, устать is really only the most mild form of fatigue. To up the exhaustion ante, try the verb pair утомляться/утомиться (to be exhausted). Он успел утомиться настолько, чтобы с полным безразличием отнестись к любой перемене в своей судьбе (He was so exhausted that he didn’t even care a bit about changing his life in any way.) Or you can add the prefix пере- (through and through) and raise the level on the fatigue-o-meter: Он успешно написал своё сочинение, но, видно, переутомился (He did a good job writing his paper, but it looks like he really wore himself out doing it.)

Another expressive way to describe your exhaustion is a series of verbs derived from мотать (to wind). Выматывать/вымотать is to unwind something, to use it all up. When applied to people, it means to exhaust someone. Хожение по магазинам всегда меня выматывает (Shopping always exhausts me.) When whatever you are doing is killing you, you can say вымотать душу (to tire to death, literally to use up someone’s soul). Начальник мне всю душу вымотал дополнительной работой (My boss just about killed me with extra work.)

The reflexive pair выматываться/вымотаться (to become worn out) can be used to describe someone’s state of fatigue: За последние месяцы она так вымоталась на своей фирме, нервы ее были так напряжены, что она оказалась на грани срыва и стала сама не своя (Over the last few months she worked herself to the bone at the office and her nerves were so shot that she was close to a nervous breakdown — she just wasn’t herself.)

Изнурять/изнурить comes from a word that means to be gloomy, but today the verb pair means to exhaust someone, I guess because exhausted people hang their heads down dourly. Тяжелая работа изнурила мальчика (Hard work tired the boy out.) It also has a reflexive verb pair: изнуряться/изнуриться (to be completely tired out). Sometimes doing nothing is as tiring as doing something: Изнурился от безделья, ожидания, что всё кончится вот-вот (He was completely exhausted by inaction, waiting for it to all end at any moment.)

You often come across this word in different forms, like here: Я вымотался, как после долгой, изнурительной работы (I was totally done in, like after doing a long spate of exhausting work.)

Instead of using one of these verbs, you can describe your fatigue more metaphorically. Your head starts to twirl or, to the contrary, become leaden. Я так устала, голова идёт кругом! (I’m so tired that my head is spinning.) Я сидела весь день за столом, переводила. Голова у меня чугунная (I spent the whole day at my desk translating. My head weighs a million tons.)

You can't think straight: Ум за разумом заходит! (I don't know if I'm coming or going!) В глазах темнеет (I can't see straight, literally I'm seeing black). And one of my personal favorites: Я как выжатый лимон (I'm all tapped out, literally I'm like a squeezed lemon). How's that for an image?

Or if you're too tired to think about any of this, you can just revert to two-letter expletives. Уф! (Whew!) is a good explosion of sound that means you're really, really tired. ☒ Уф! ☒ сказал переводчик и повалился в кресло ("Whew!" the translator said and fell into the armchair.)

After you somehow manage to carry that 50-kilo box of canning jars up from the basement and, when you succeed in slowly lowering it to the floor so that nothing breaks, you can sigh, Уф-да! — a satisfying combination of nonsense sounds that means: "Phew! Glad that's over!"

I wish you all a happy уф-да end to your week.

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