

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), also known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), is a complex multifaceted disorder characterized by extreme fatigue that doesn't improve with bed rest and may worsen with physical or mental activity. It may occur after an infection, such as a cold or viral illness. The onset is variable and can occur during or shortly after a time of great stress, or CFS come on gradually without a clear starting point or obvious cause.

Symptoms

CFS is characterised by a persistent fatigue, not caused by other known medical conditions. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has eight possible primary signs and symptoms:

- Loss of memory or concentration
- Sore throat
- Painful and mildly enlarged lymph nodes (in neck or armpits)
- Unexplained muscle soreness
- Pain that moves from one joint to another without swelling or redness
- Headache of a new type, pattern or severity
- Sleep disturbance
- Extreme exhaustion lasting more than 24 hours after physical or mental exercise

In addition, people with chronic fatigue syndrome may report additional signs and symptoms that are not part of the official definition.

When to seek advice

Certain conditions need to be excluded before a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome is made by a medical specialist, for example:

- Active, identifiable medical conditions that often result in fatigue, such as low levels of thyroid hormones (hypothyroidism) or sleep apnoea
- Side effects of prescribed medication may cause fatigue
- Relapse of a previously treated illness can result in fatigue, for example cancer
- Alcohol or other substance misuse
- Severe obesity, as defined by a body mass index (BMI) of 45 or greater

Possible Complications

There are factors which may complicate the treatment and management of CFS:

- Depression, related both to symptoms and lack of diagnosis
- Side effects and adverse reactions related to medication treatments
- Side effects and adverse reactions associated with lack of activity (deconditioning)
- Social isolation and withdrawal
- Limited family / whanau support
- Lifestyle restrictions
- Workplace factors

Psychological Therapy

Treatment of CFS can be considered within biopsychosocial perspective, which means assessing and treating the whole person.

The type of psychological therapy offered is focussed on the person's individual needs and preferences as determined during the psychological assessment:

- Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy CBT
- Mindfulness
- Motivational Interviewing
- Stress management / reduction
- Applied Relaxation
- Exposure based treatments
- Problem Solving
- Emotional Regulation and Distress Tolerance
- Psychodynamic approaches

Psychological Interventions

Psychological intervention includes education and understanding CFS, learning how to manage symptoms and activity in ways to optimise health and wellbeing: Other factors central to the psychological treatment and management of fibromyalgia may include some of the following as according to the type of therapy offered:

- Psycho-education and understanding of CFS
- Understanding and managing emotions (anxiety, depression, stress, fear, anger, low mood)
- Identifying and managing appropriate levels of activity and pacing
- Memory skills training
- Cognitive coping
- Managing sleep disturbance
- Pain management techniques (distraction, relaxation, pain transformation, acceptance)
- Understanding and managing diet, alcohol, caffeine
- Supporting effective prescribed medication use and adherence
- Goal setting or identifying values central to the individuals wellbeing
- Addressing interpersonal issues affecting management CFS
- Re-engagement with family, whanau, friends and social activities
- Gradually resuming participation in work, hobbies interests or meaningful activities