

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



So what is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a neurological condition that affects both the nervous and immune systems. It develops slowly over time, and is thought to be triggered by a viral infection, trauma (major life event) or major surgery. The symptoms include:

- unexplainable extreme fatigue (out of proportion to fatigue experienced after doing some heavy work)
- muscle pain
- inability to sleep
- brain fog (poor concentration, memory and thinking)

CFS is associated with a group of diseases that have similar symptoms but are not well-understood such as fibromyalgia, lyme disease, multiple sclerosis and others. These conditions all have an uncertain origin, cause cognitive symptoms and lead to extreme fatigue and joint pains.

CFS or ME is associated with severe fatigue which is not relieved by rest, and the symptoms can last beyond six months - when all other treatable alternative conditions have been considered but the patient is not improving.

What to expect?

This condition is not easy to diagnose and has no treatment. It is a very difficult condition to cope with and is commonly found in females between the ages of 40 and 60 years old, and only 0.4% of the population get it.



People with CFS or ME cannot do even minimal tasks such as bathing themselves or preparing a meal. They generally struggle to participate in family or work activities that were previously normal to them, do not participate in social and family activities, tend to remain in bed or in the house.



Living with CFS or ME

Once a person is diagnosed with CFS or ME, they must start treatment as soon as possible since the condition has no cure. Less than half of the people who suffer from CFS or ME get better. To ease the symptoms, they can:

- **Seek psychotherapy**, with a focus on cognitive behavioural therapy - the intention is to address fear, avoidance and to work on perceptions and beliefs about the illness.
- **Take part in small efforts of exercise** - this is usually possible after a few sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy. Regular short walks are a good place to start, and these efforts can increase gradually over time. Efforts at managing their energy and documenting their movements is crucial.
- **Take pain medicine and adopt good sleep habits.** Other lifestyle changes include a good healthy diet, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.



Dealing with CFS or ME and work

The extreme fatigue and poor cognitive abilities often interfere with most CFS patients' capacity to continue their usual work. Flexibility is required in the early stages of the illness. Some people improve, and their responsibilities and tolerance efforts can be adjusted accordingly.

This might mean gradual return to work for two to four hours if they were completely booked off, and might need to perform tasks that can be done seated.

It is important to remember that CFS or ME causes physical limitations but the employee is not mentally incapacitated. Accommodations in the workplace can be adjusted based on the employee's ability to cope.



CFS or ME is a complicated condition which is still poorly understood and may look different in one person compared to the next. If you have been diagnosed with this condition, practice self-compassion and be diligent with seeking help. If your loved one or colleague has this condition, practise empathy and support them as they might have customised needs.

Source: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

