



# CHRONIC FATIGUE

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), also known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) is a long-term condition that can be extremely debilitating. It is more common in women between the ages of 20 - 40 but it can occur in men and in children.

Characterised by both mental and physical fatigue that is not helped by sleep. Severe, disabling fatigue and a combination of symptoms impair concentration and short-term memory, sleep disturbance and muscle and joint pain. This illness has a significant impact on the ability to be able to function day to day in all areas - socially, emotionally, personally and in the workplace. Even showering or preparing a meal can be physically and mentally exhausting.

The extreme exhaustion felt in CFS is extremely disabling and at times causes people to be confined to bed. There is no specific test for CFS, it is diagnosed based on a range of symptoms over a period of time (usually 6 months) after other causes have been ruled out.

CFS/ME can be associated with severe disability but most cases are mild to moderate.



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## Signs And Symptoms of Chronic Fatigue

Symptoms of CFS/ME can appear very similar to other disorders in the early stages which is why diagnosis can be challenging. Symptoms can come and go and vary over time but the main symptom is extreme tiredness and feeling of being generally unwell. This level of exhaustion is very different to simply feeling tired, you may be experiencing:

- Exhaustion when trying to do simple tasks like eating, climbing stairs and showering or brushing your teeth
- Sleep problems - this could be difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep, sleeping for longer periods but not feeling refreshed or a disturbed sleep cycle including sleeping for long periods in the day.
- Multiple area of joint and muscle pain without any known cause
- Headaches
- Pain around lymph nodes - armpits, groin, neck
- Sore throat - this may be present continuously or can come and go over time
- Difficulty thinking and concentrating on a task - reading a book or watching a film may be hard
- Memory problems and difficulty finding words or processing information
- General feeling of being unwell or 'flu-like' symptoms
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded can also be a symptom
- Palpitations

If you are experiencing pain into the bottom, hips or further into your legs, or you have pins and needles or numbness, you may be suffering with sciatica - please refer to the document on 'Sciatica' if you think this applies to you.

## Causes of CFS/ME

It isn't known exactly what causes CFS/ME and it is likely that there are a number of factors that contribute to the development of this condition. Environmental factors (lifestyle, personal and emotional stress), altered processing of information by the body and genetic factors may play a role. It may also develop after an infection like pneumonia or a virus.

## Top Tips to Manage Chronic Fatigue

There is no one cure for Chronic Fatigue syndrome or ME. Most treatments are directed towards dealing with the symptoms. Treating the symptoms can provide some relief and learning new techniques can be effective.

- Pain relief for aching muscles and painful joints can be helpful, paracetamol can be effective, but if you find this is not enough, speak to your GP.
- Pace your activity - this means that you need to take regular breaks from activity. So if you are doing the washing, do a little, rest and then return to the task. This helps to reduce the exhaustion and tiredness you feel with activity
- Graded Exercise Therapy (GET) - Avoid strenuous activity. Don't take on too much like an aerobics class or a long walk. This could increase your symptoms and make you tired and unable to do much for days. Instead, try gradually increasing your distance or activity a little over time. Your Physiotherapist can help you develop a personalised plan to tackle this problem.
- Sleep hygiene - have a good sleep routine, go to bed at the same time each night, avoid fizzy drinks and screens before bed and try a warm bath.
- CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) can help you cope with setbacks and limitations from this condition, as well as teaching you strategies to overcome fatigue.
- Counselling or Psychotherapy - It can be difficult to adjust to a diagnosis of CFS/ME. Counselling and Psychotherapy can help you come to terms with your diagnosis and also help you to develop a plan for the future.
- Memory and Concentration - The GP may refer you to a memory clinic where you can learn tips and techniques to aid your memory.
- A balanced diet - Nutrition is vitally important but you can often feel like even making and eating a meal is too much. Prep your food, make ahead or in stages and make sure you vary your diet.
- A Family Affair - Get the family involved, a diagnosis such as CFS/ME can affect the whole family. You need to know how they feel and how they can help you. You are never on your own, Family and Couples Counselling is available to help and can be extremely useful in bringing people together after a diagnosis.

## Further Support - When to seek help

Speak to your GP first about your concerns and the future

NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-cfs/>

Torus Wellbeing Clinic - we have expert practitioners to support you throughout.



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