

## Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

### What is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)?

The early sign of this illness is a strong and noticeable fatigue that comes on suddenly. CFS is diagnosed two to four times more often in women, possibly because of biological, psychological, and social influences. This illness affects all racial and ethnic groups. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that as many as 500,000 people in the United States suffer from this non-contagious syndrome. The illness severely affects everyday activities, causing physical and emotional symptoms that can last for months or even years. Most people experience this illness between the ages of 20 and 40, but the disorder also occurs in adolescents.

### How CFS Begins, Its Symptoms and Diagnosis

For many people, CFS begins after a bout with a cold, bronchitis, hepatitis, an intestinal bug, mono or during a high stress period. In order to receive a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome, a patient must satisfy two criteria: 1) Have severe chronic fatigue for six months or longer; and 2) concurrently have four or more of the following symptoms:

- ▶ Headaches of a new type, pattern, or intensity
- ▶ Impaired memory and/or inability to concentrate
- ▶ Multi-joint pain without swelling or redness
- ▶ Insomnia or un-refreshing sleep
- ▶ Sore throat
- ▶ Weakness
- ▶ Tender lymph nodes
- ▶ Muscle pain or aches
- ▶ Discomfort or "out-of-sorts" feeling after physical exertion

### How to Cope with and Manage the Illness

Learning how to manage fatigue may help improve the level of functioning and quality of life despite symptoms. Health experts recommend maintaining good health by eating a balanced diet and getting adequate rest, exercising regularly but without causing more fatigue and pacing oneself physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

### Treatment of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

- ▶ *Education* - Learn to adjust activities and behaviors that may aggravate the illness.
- ▶ *Prescription Medications* – Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for relief of pain and low-dose tricyclic antidepressants to improve sleep.
- ▶ *Physical Activity* - know how much to do and when to stop the activity.
- ▶ *Therapies* may contribute to feeling better, but they are most effective when combined with physical activity. Therapies include massage therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic or therapeutic touch.

### Similar Medical Conditions

A number of illnesses have been described that have a similar spectrum of symptoms to CFS. One of these is fibromyalgia (FM). It is not uncommon for a person to have both FM and CFS. Some experts believe that the two conditions are variations of the same disorder. Both have pain and fatigue as symptoms, but FM patients suffer from "tender points" in specific areas of the body that are painful when pressure is applied to them.

***This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.***

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