

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)

Summary of Condition

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) causes persistent fatigue (exhaustion) that affects everyday life and doesn't go away with sleep or rest.

CFS is also known as ME, which stands for myalgic encephalomyelitis. Myalgia means muscle pain and encephalomyelitis means inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. Both CFS and ME are commonly used terms.

Sometimes the term 'myalgic encephalopathy' is used. Encephalopathy means a condition that affects brain function. CFS is a serious condition that can cause long-term illness and disability, but many people – particularly children and young people – improve over time.

Who is affected

It is estimated that around 250,000 people in the UK have CFS.

Anyone can get CFS, although it is more common in women than in men. It usually develops in the early 20s to mid-40s. Children can also be affected, usually between the ages of 13 and 15.

How it affects quality of life

Most cases of CFS are mild or moderate, but up to one in four people with CFS have severe symptoms. These are defined as follows:

- Mild: you are able to care for yourself, but may need days off work to rest.
- Moderate: you may have reduced mobility, and your symptoms can vary. You may also have disturbed sleep patterns, and need to sleep in the afternoon.
- Severe: you are able to carry out minimal daily tasks, such as brushing your teeth, but you have significantly reduced mobility. You may also have difficulty concentrating.

There is no cure for CFS, so treatment aims to reduce the symptoms. Everyone with CFS responds to treatment differently, so your treatment plan will be tailored to you.

Some of the main treatments include:

- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- a structured exercise programme called graded exercise therapy
- medication to control pain, nausea and sleeping problems

Treatments such as these can help improve CFS in most cases, although some people do not make a full recovery. It is also likely there will be periods when symptoms get better or worse.

Useful Website links

If you are interested in finding more information about this condition, you can visit the following websites:

- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-fatigue-syndrome/Pages/Symptoms.aspx
- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-fatigue-syndrome/Pages/Causes.aspx
- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-fatigue-syndrome/Pages/Diagnosis.aspx
- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-fatigue-syndrome/Pages/Treatment.aspx
- www.meassociation.org.uk/information-and-support-line/meconnect