

# CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME (CFS/ME)

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Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a complex chronic condition characterised by ongoing exhaustion. It's also known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) - and in NZ colloquially as Tapanui or Yuppie Flu. Myalgia refers to muscle pain.

## SYMPTOMS

- Extreme exhaustion lasting more than six months
- Cognitive and memory problems
- Insomnia and difficulty sleeping
- Muscle aches or weakness
- Pain or aches in joints or skin, without redness or swelling
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands
- Tender lymph nodes in neck or under arm
- Feeling dizzy or faint when sitting up or standing
- Post-exercise fatigue
- Headaches of a new type, pattern or strength

Symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome often come and go, with periods of mild symptoms punctuated by relapses of more serious fatigue and other symptoms.

Symptoms often overlap with Fibromyalgia but Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is not characterised by tender points.

## CAUSES

The cause of CFS is not yet fully understood, but it is likely that several factors contribute to its development. There are changes in the immune system and body chemistry.

CFS is usually triggered by a viral infection, such as glandular fever or influenza, but any infection may be the trigger. It is likely that the potential for getting CFS is genetic and runs in families. Some people experience ongoing effects of COVID-19 infection, known as long COVID, which are very similar to the symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

## RISK FACTORS

CFS affects all ages and socio-economic groups. Known risk factors are:

- **Genetic vulnerability**
- **Trigger:** viral illness, non-viral infection, vaccination, chemical poisoning or physical trauma

### DIAGNOSIS

CFS is diagnosed when symptoms match both of the following criteria:

- Severe chronic fatigue lasting six months or longer, other medical conditions are ruled out by clinical diagnosis, fatigue is not lifelong or the result of ongoing exertion, and is not relieved by rest
- Four or more of the other symptoms, not experienced before the fatigue started

Diagnosis may range from mild CFS to severe CFS.

### TREATMENT OPTIONS

CFS can be difficult to treat and the aim of a treatment plan is to alleviate symptoms and aid recovery. As well as medical interventions, self-care is important. Because there can be sensitivities, medications and supplements should be discussed thoroughly with a GP.

#### Medication

Analgesics can help ease headaches as well as muscle and joint pain. Stronger painkillers can be prescribed, although they should be used on a short-term basis.

Medication may improve sleep quality and antidepressants can help if experiencing depression or anxiety as a result of living with CFS.

#### Using the pacing technique

Pacing for CFS means breaking up your day into short periods of activity with rest in between. By prioritising important activities and dropping less important ones, energy may be found to fulfil essential and desired activities

#### Stress and sleep management

Stress can aggravate most symptoms. Relaxation methods and mindfulness can help reduce stress, tension and anxiety by redirecting thoughts. Prioritising sleep is important

#### Nutritional changes and supplements

Eating healthily can help with symptoms, as well as minimising processed foods, sugar and caffeine. If blood tests indicate deficiencies, supplements can be discussed with a GP.

#### Movement Therapies

Exercises such as Yoga and Tai Chi may improve mobility and decrease muscle tightness.

#### Complementary Therapies

Therapies such as acupuncture, massage, infra-red heat, hot packs and TENS machines may help ease muscle tension.

### Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a form of counselling that can help adjust to living with symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

#### For further information and support:

- Insight Endometriosis: Fibromyalgia
- Insight Endometriosis: Pacing for Pain Management and Pacing Template
- Insight Endometriosis: Mental Wellbeing and Self-Care
- NHS Guide to Sleep: <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/leaflets/Sleeping%20Problems.pdf>
- Associated New Zealand ME Society (ANZMES): <https://anzmes.org.nz/>
- Dr Rosamund Vallings: <http://www.drvallings.co.nz/>
- CFS and Covid-19: <http://www.drvallings.co.nz/cfsme-and-covid-19.html>

#### References:

- Health Navigator - <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/c/chronic-fatigue-syndrome/>

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