

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is a chronic condition characterised by ongoing exhaustion. The term ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalopathy / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) is currently the most widely used term, but it is known by many other names such as Tapanui and Yuppie flu.

What are the usual symptoms?

- Extreme exhaustion lasting more than six months, which cannot be explained by tests for other conditions, and which often begins after flu-like symptoms where acute symptoms resolve but fatigue continues
- Problems with concentration or memory
- Insomnia and difficulty sleeping, resulting in unrefreshing sleep
- 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, extending to the following day
- Headaches of a new type, pattern or strength
- Gastrointestinal symptoms

Symptoms often come and go, with periods of general malaise punctuated by relapses of more serious fatigue and other symptoms.

Many symptoms overlap with fibromyalgia, but ME/CFS is not characterised by tender points. It is not uncommon to have both conditions; some experts believe they are different expressions of a single condition.

Causes

Typically but not always ME/CFS follows a viral illness such as glandular fever. Less commonly it occurs after non-viral infections, vaccinations, chemical poisoning, or physical trauma such as an accident or surgery.

Risk factors

ME/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

Impacts

ME/CFS can result in wide impacts, including:

- **Lower quality of life**, sometimes compounded by **inability to work or study**.
- **Disability** due to exhaustion, especially after physical activity.
- **Emotional troubles**: The chronic nature of the condition, alongside interrupted sleep may cause emotional stress and may lead to depression.

What should I do if I think I have ME/CFS?

Use this quiz to help you decide if you need to seek medical advice:

- Have you had chronic tiredness lasting up to six months or more?
- Are you unusually forgetful or have difficulty concentrating?
- Insomnia and difficulty sleeping, resulting in unrefreshing sleep
- Muscle aches or weakness
- Pain or aches in joints or skin, without redness or swelling
- Do you have a sore throat, swollen glands, and tender lymph nodes in your neck or under your arm?
- Did these symptoms start after flu-like symptoms (such as fever, sore throat, swollen glands, muscle/joint pains), or a serious illness or some physical trauma such as an accident or chemical poisoning?

If you're experiencing these sorts of symptoms affecting your daily life, take this checklist to your GP to discuss getting tested for ME/CFS.

What can help?

ME/CFS can be difficult to diagnose and treat. Many lifestyle changes can be helpful such as stress and sleep management, pacing and a balanced exercise routine, eating well, psychological support such as support groups, and complementary therapies such as relaxation and breathing exercises. Supplements can help diagnosed deficiencies.

Suggested Resources:

- Information and support from ANZMES: www.ANZMES.org.nz
- Information and support from MS Waikato: www.MSWaikato.org.nz/ME.asp
Contact their Support Co-ordinator Tracey Larsen (ph 07 8344745)
- The Insight Endometriosis fact sheets on Fibromyalgia and Symptom Diaries

Source: Adapted from information from WomensHealth.gov and ANZMES websites

For more information: visit www.InsightEndometriosis.org.nz or www.facebook.com/InsightEndometriosis or contact our Educator, Annette ph 07 8555 123 | email info@InsightEndometriosis.org.nz | FB message.
