

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

<http://familydoctor.org/handouts/031.html>

How do I know if I might have chronic fatigue syndrome?

If you answer yes to any of the questions listed below, you may have chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), which is also called chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS).

- Have you been tired (fatigued) for a long time--more than 6 months--even though you are getting enough rest and are not working too hard?
- 1. Has your doctor been unable to find illnesses that could explain your symptoms?
- 1. Are you able to do less than half of what you used to do because you feel tired?
- 1. Have you had problems that keep coming back or don't go away for 6 months or more with four or more of the following signs and symptoms?
 1. Sore throat
 2. Tender or painful lymph nodes in neck or armpits
 3. Unexplained muscle soreness
 4. Pain that moves from joint to joint but doesn't include redness or swelling
 5. Headaches that are different from the kind you usually get or headaches that make your whole head hurt
 6. Trouble with short-term memory or concentration
 7. Feeling tired for more than 24 hours after exercise that didn't bother you before
 8. Trouble sleeping

People with CFS may have other symptoms as well.

What causes chronic fatigue syndrome?

No one is certain about what causes CFS. The symptoms may be caused by an immune system that isn't working well. Or they may be caused by some kind of virus. Researchers are looking for the cause of CFS.

How is chronic fatigue syndrome treated?

The first step is to see if there is a medical cause for your fatigue. Your doctor will probably want to review your symptoms and medical history, and give you a physical exam. Your doctor may also want to do some blood tests, but lab testing is not often helpful.

Some of the symptoms, such as muscle aches, sleep problems, anxiety and depression, can be treated with medicine. The medicine can only reduce your symptoms and allow you to be more active, not cure the fatigue. So far, there is no medicine that cures the entire syndrome. Most symptoms improve with time.

How can I help myself?

9. Keep a daily diary to identify times when you have the most energy. Plan your activities for these times.
10. Keep up some level of activity and exercise, within your abilities. Your doctor can help you plan an exercise program to maintain your strength at whatever level is possible. Exercise can help your body and mind.
11. Give yourself permission to recognize and express your feelings, such as sadness, anger and frustration. You need to grieve for the energy you have lost.
12. Ask for support from family and friends. Look for support groups or counseling in your community. Your doctor is another important source of help. Emotional support is important in coping with a chronic health problem.
13. If your memory and concentration are affected by chronic fatigue, keep lists and make notes to remind yourself of important things. Also, give yourself more time for activities that take concentration. Medicine may also help you sleep better, which might improve your memory and concentration.

How can my doctor help?

Your doctor can work with you to provide symptom relief and to help you find ways of coping with the way CFS changes your life. Chronic fatigue affects you physically, emotionally and socially. When you address all of these factors, you have the best chance of adjusting to your illness and feeling more satisfied with your life.

If you have CFS, a good long-term relationship with your doctor helps. This relationship can be the key to helping you feel less frustrated.

Where can I get more information?

National Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Association
P.O. Box 18426
Kansas City, MO 64133
816-313-2000 (24-hour number)
www.ncfsfa.org

Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome Association of America, Inc.
P.O. Box 220398
Charlotte, NC 28222-0398
800-442-3437 (24-hour number)
www.cfids.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Infectious Diseases
Mailstop C-14
1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30333
888-232-3228
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/cfs/index.htm>

(Created 9/00)
(Updated 02/03)

