



Health & Wellness

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



Chronic fatigue syndrome is a disorder characterized by extreme fatigue that may worsen with physical or mental activity, but doesn't improve with rest. Although there are many theories about what causes this condition—ranging from viral infections to psychological stress—in most cases the cause is unknown. However, effective treatments for the signs and symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome are available, and many people recover from the disorder with time.

Symptoms

The experience of chronic fatigue syndrome varies from person-to-person. For many people, the symptoms are more bothersome early in the course of the illness, then gradually decrease.

Chronic fatigue syndrome symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Loss of memory or concentration
- Sore throat
- Painful and mildly enlarged lymph nodes in your neck or armpits
- Unexplained muscle pain
- Pain that moves from one joint to another without swelling or redness
- Headache of a new type, pattern or severity
- Un-refreshing sleep
- Extreme exhaustion lasting more than 24 hours after physical or mental exercise

People with chronic fatigue syndrome have reported additional various signs and symptoms, such as:

- Abdominal pain
- Allergies or sensitivities to foods, alcohol, odors, chemicals, medications or noise

- Bloating
- Chest pain
- Chronic cough
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness, balance problems or fainting
- Dry mouth
- Earache
- Irregular heartbeat
- Jaw pain
- Morning stiffness
- Nausea
- Chills and night sweats
- Psychological problems, such as depression, irritability, anxiety disorders and panic attacks
- Shortness of breath
- Tingling sensations
- Visual disturbances, such as blurring, sensitivity to light, eye pain and dry eyes
- Weight loss or gain

Symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome frequently come and go with no identifiable pattern. If you have chronic fatigue syndrome, your symptoms may peak and become stable early on, and then come and go over time. Some people go on to recover completely, while others grow progressively worse. The earlier a person with chronic fatigue syndrome receives medical treatment, the greater the likelihood that the illness will resolve.

Severe fatigue that prevents you from fully participating in activities at home, work or school may be a symptom of an underlying medical problem. In general, see your doctor if you have persistent or excessive fatigue.

Symptom Management

Temporary symptom relief may be achieved with over-the-counter pain relievers. Before you speak with your doctor, try pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others).

Improve your levels of function and quality of life by managing your fatigue. Despite your symptoms, learning how to manage your fatigue can help you feel better. To boost your chances of sleeping well at night, avoid naps during the day and establish a routine of going to bed around the same time each night. Other adjustments that may help you fully rest include light exercise and stretching several hours before bedtime, as well as generally avoiding caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. You may want to seek assistance from a rehabilitation medicine specialist who can teach you how to plan activities and take advantage of times when you usually feel better.

Maintain your general health with important self-care steps:

Reduce stress

Develop a plan to avoid or limit overexertion and emotional stress. Allow yourself time each day to relax. This may mean learning how to say no without guilt.

Get enough sleep

Getting sufficient sleep is essential. In addition to allotting enough time for sleep, practice good sleep habits, such as going to bed and getting up at the same time each day and avoiding daytime napping.



Exercise regularly

You may need to start slowly and build up gradually, but exercising regularly often improves symptoms. Many people find exercises such as walking, swimming, biking and water aerobics to be helpful. A physical therapist may help you develop a home-exercise program. Stretching, good posture and relaxation exercises can also be helpful.

Pace yourself

Keep your activities balanced. Doing too much on your good days could result in more bad days.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Try to eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of fluids, limit your caffeine intake, stop smoking, get adequate rest and exercise regularly. Find a hobby or career that is enjoyable and fulfilling for you.

Other complementary therapies that may reduce anxiety and promote wellbeing in people with chronic fatigue syndrome include:

- Deep-breathing and muscle-relaxation techniques
- Meditation
- Massage and healing touch
- Movement therapies such as stretching, yoga and tai chi

Coping and Support

It is important to get the emotional support you need. Emotional support and counseling may help you and your loved ones deal with the uncertainties and restrictions of chronic fatigue syndrome. You may find it therapeutic to join a support group and meet other people with the disorder, but support groups are not for everyone. Experiment and use your judgment to determine what's best for you.



- Avoid naps
- Go to bed at the same time each night
- Do light exercise or stretching a few hours before bed
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine before bed