
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

What is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)?

Chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, is a disorder characterized by disabling fatigue that is not improved with rest or relaxation. People diagnosed with CFS are more likely to have lower levels of activity as compared to their activity levels before the onset of the disorder. As a result of the significant fatigue, patients report that they struggle with daily life activities.

Who gets CFS?

While CFS does not discriminate against age, gender, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status, research suggests that women are **4X** more likely to get CFS than men. Statistics also show that people between ages 40 and 59 are most affected by the disorder.

What Causes CFS?

Unfortunately the single cause of CFS is still unknown. However, there are several theories that suggest multiple causes for the onset of CFS. Research shows that

infectious agents, immunological dysfunction, stress activating the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis, neurally mediated hypotension, and/or nutritional deficiency may all be causes for CFS. Currently, there are a growing number of research studies to address these causes.

Symptoms of CFS

To be diagnosed with CFS two criteria must be met. A person must:

1. Have severe chronic fatigue for at least 6 months > that is not lessened by rest and not due to medical or psychiatric conditions associated with fatigue

and

2. At the same time, have **4** or more of the following symptoms:

- Self-reported impairment in short-term memory or concentration severe enough to cause substantial reduction in previous levels of occupational, educational, social, or personal activities
- Recurring or frequent sore throat
- Tender cervical or axillary lymph nodes
- Muscle pain
- Multi-joint pain without swelling or redness
- Headaches of a new type, pattern, or severity
- Non-restorative sleep (you do not feel rested)
- Post-exertional malaise (extreme, prolonged exhaustion and sickness following physical or mental activity) lasting more than 24 hours.

Other Symptoms you may experience:

- Visual disturbances (blurring, sensitivity to light, eye pain)
- Psychological symptoms (irritability, mood swings, panic attacks, anxiety)

- Chills and night sweats
- Low grade fever or low body temperature
- Irritable bowel
- Allergies and sensitivities to foods, odors, chemicals, medications, and noise/sound
- Numbness, tingling, or burning sensations in the face, hands, or feet
- Difficulty sitting or standing straight up, dizziness, balance problems, and fainting

Types of Treatment

- Professional Counseling
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Graded Exercise Therapy (GET)
- Symptomatic Treatment
- Alternative Therapies
- Support Groups
- Pharmacologic Therapy
- Sleep Hygiene
- Pain Therapy
- Orthostatic Instability Treatment
- Antidepressants

Managing activity and exercise are important to living a healthy life with CFS. Due to the disabling fatigue, activity and exercise must be done gradually and watched closely. The key to managing CFS is the ability to manage activity and exercise, as not to over exert oneself or avoid activities altogether. It is important to consult your health care professional when developing a plan for activity and exercise.

For more information on treatment options:

[CDC Treatment Options:](http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/general/treatment/options.html) <http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/general/treatment/options.html>

[CDC Managing Activity and Exercise:](http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/general/treatment/managing_activity.html) http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/general/treatment/managing_activity.html

Where Can I Find Help?

Important Note

Prior to any treatment of CFS, it is important that you have a thorough examination and evaluation by your health care provider so that the best treatment can be determined. An essential part of your treatment will be your understanding of CFS and its possible causes.

For more information about chronic fatigue syndrome, call womenshealth.gov at 800-994-9662 (TDD: 888-220-5446) or contact the following organizations:

- [Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome Association of America](#) 
Phone: 704-365-2343
- [Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, CDC, HHS](#) 
- [Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Advisory Committee, HHS](#) 
Phone: 202-690-7650
- [International Association for CFS/ME](#) 
Phone: 847-258-7248
- [National CFIDS Foundation](#) 
Phone: 781-449-3535
- [National Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Association](#) 
Phone: 816-737-1343
- [The Trans-NIH Working Group on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome](#) 
Phone: 301-402-1770

Information contained within this fact sheet was adapted from the following sources:

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

[Women's Health.Gov](#)