



AYOT PLACE PRACTICE

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FACT SHEET ON CFS AND ME (CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME & MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELOPATHY)

Introduction

The terms CFS and ME are used interchangeably to describe a group of symptoms of varying severity. The symptoms can mimic a number of other conditions such as thyroid or other hormone problems, virus infections, depression, or even rheumatoid arthritis so it is important to see your GP to discuss having tests carried out to discount such illnesses.

CFS/ME can have a great impact on your life and it is useful to have support and understanding from your family, friends, school or employer and health practitioner- you could show them this fact sheet. Remember, people who get CFS/ME are often very conscientious, hardworking and active before they develop the condition and, in fact, it is this determination and dynamism that can cause them to become ill.

Symptoms

These vary from person to person but they include a large number of physical and emotional symptoms. Some people will have only a few of these, some will have most:

Exhaustion, heavy limbs, unrefreshing sleep, depression & low mood, joint pain, muscle aches/cramps, digestive upset (e.g. nausea, IBS, stomach ache), sore throat, catarrh, raised lymph nodes, earaches, headache, post-exercise malaise, cold hands & feet, insomnia, palpitations. Failure to get proper head colds is an important common sign.

Causes

There is no one cause for CFS/ME. CFS results from repeated combinations of physiological challenges combined with lifestyle factors, such as:

1. Infection (e.g. influenza, glandular fever)
2. Over-work
3. Lack of rest
4. Poor nutrition
5. Not resting when ill

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6. Circulatory changes
7. Emotional illness or upset
8. Encephalopathy (infection or inflammation to the brain)
9. Immunological activity (raised cytokines)
10. Other Immunological challenge (e.g. inoculation)

There are sometimes definite measurable physiological changes that can be picked up in blood tests (e.g. raised C-reactive protein). CFS/ME may be an inflammatory process causing the production of chemicals called cytokines that make the body to want to rest. The nervous system is affected and this in turn affects most of the body's processes. CFS/ME is not a damaged part of the body, but it is as if the body has learned the wrong response to illness. When we get a cold or 'flu or stomach infection we need to allow ourselves to be ill, manage the illness properly and rest, so that the body is given a chance to heal itself. We should not just carry on regardless because, if we do this too often, then it can cause CFS/ME. Illness is helpful if it teaches the body how to be ill and then heal. It is as if the bodies of those with CFS/ME have forgotten how to be ill, but also how to be well. Which is why sufferers may never have a proper cold, but may always feel ill.

TREATMENTS: Because CFS/ME has a combination of causes then the treatment also needs to be targeted in a number of ways. The condition is likely to be overcome more quickly with a combination of the following. Much of this information is based on scientific research:

1. Diet modification and enhancement. Key elements in a healthy diet:

- 1 Have at least 5 pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables every day
- 2 Aim for the right balance of essential fatty acids, increasing Omega 3 fatty acids (found in fish and flax/linseeds) and reducing sunflower products
- 3 Wholegrain cereals, nuts, seeds (e.g. pumpkin, sesame)
- 4 Dairy products
- 5 Have at least two litres of water daily, or use herb tea or squash
- 6 Avoid foods that challenge immunity (e.g. pesticides), so fresh, organic is best
- 7 Avoid foods that cause inflammation. Some people are sensitive to foods such as tomatoes, red meat, oranges or even wheat. Try giving up each of these in turn for a week, then reintroducing them, seeing if this affects your symptoms.
- 8 Supplements shown to be useful.
 - High potency A-Z multivitamins and minerals high, in B vitamins.
 - Anti-oxidants, e.g. vitamin C.
 - Calcium, best combined with Magnesium.
 - Omega 3 essential fatty acids as found in fish oils or linseed oil.

2. Exercise treatment

1. Gradual introduction of exercise (needs to be at least five days a week)
2. Individual programmes set up starting with 5-15 minutes per day
3. The main exercise suggested is walking (and also some cycling and swimming)

4. Also some flexibility treatments are an important addition, e.g. yoga or stretches
5. It is important not to do too much when you feel well- stay with the programme
6. Remember, exercise increases immunity

3. Psychological management

1. Psychological techniques, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, challenge the attitudes about symptoms and ability to overcome the illness. You are not a victim of your illness; you have the power to get better.
2. Meditation and visualisation can be very helpful. You can visualise yourself as well and healthy- the power of the mind over the body is very strong- you may have heard about the placebo effect- the body wants to get better.

4. Herbal medicine.

Herbs contain hundreds of phytochemicals that can act gently but powerfully on the body's health and vitality. Many herbs have shown to be helpful, but it is best to have the right combination prescribed for you by a qualified herbalist.

5. Adopt a less demanding lifestyle

1. Not all of us are suited to a high pressured and stressful lifestyle. We can set ourselves up for failure if we measure our achievements against those of others.
2. Think about your individual skills and talents, rather than the expectations that have been put on you by your family or by society at large. A new direction can sometimes be the catalyst for healing.

6. Try to achieve something every day, no matter how small.

CONCLUSION: There is good evidence for the effectiveness of a varied approach, of nutrition, psychological therapy, supplements, graded exercises and herbal medicine.

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