

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome—there is hope!

Imagine waking up every morning feeling like you have a hangover combined with the flu, and even the smallest amount of activity leaves you exhausted? That's what life is like for almost a quarter of a million Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) sufferers in the UK. Also known as Myalgic Encephalitis (ME), this mysterious illness has only recently finally been officially recognised by the Department of Health.

So what is CFS? Why is it surrounded in mystery? And how do you know if I've got it?

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is a devastating and debilitating potentially chronic illness that is characterised by profound exhaustion, muscle pain and cognitive problems such as memory and concentration loss. Other symptoms that are common include sensitivity to light, noise and smell; disturbed sleep patterns and persistent headaches. These symptoms fluctuate from day to day.

The reasons why it is mysterious is because no two patients are the same, it is difficult to diagnose because there aren't any conventional recognised tests for it, and there are various causes, although it is estimated that around two-thirds of all cases are preceded by a viral infection of some kind. Other contributing factors include neurotoxins (such as organophosphates), exhaustion, mental stress and poor diet.

What are the warning signs? Fatigue is the principal symptom, it is severe, disabling and affects physical and mental functioning. Other typical symptoms include muscle pain and aching on minimal exercise, as well as mood and sleep disturbance. If any of this rings true for you then you should see your GP as it is important to have other disorders ruled out such as abnormal thyroid function and depression amongst others.

Symptoms need to have been present for a prolonged period of time for a true diagnosis to be made.

If your GP makes the diagnosis what should you do?

We encourage people to work towards recovery in order to get back to their normal lives. Finding the best balance between rest and activity is essential, remembering that most people do improve over time to a significant degree.

Rest from mental activity and emotional stress is also very important, particularly in the early stages of the illness, however it is possible to rest too much as your muscles may become de-conditioned. "Pacing" means alternating activity with rest, also alternating different activities e.g. mental work with physical tasks, stopping each before you become exhausted.

You may find it helpful to keep a diary, and a good healthy diet is particularly important (see below)

Conventional Doctors will often recommend one of three treatments. These are antidepressants, Graded Exercise and /or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Antidepressants have been shown to improve outcome and Graded Exercise is an agreed programme of gradually increasing exercise, tailored to the patient's ability to cope.

CBT aims to support rehabilitation by addressing detrimental thoughts and behaviours, helping people to recover.

As far as accessing specialist treatment for M.E., unfortunately services are extremely patchy across the UK. There are only a very small number of units that deal specifically with CFS, and waiting lists are long.

In August 2000 "action for ME commissioned research which showed that many people found that in addition to those treatments above complementary approaches were also of benefit.

At the Winchester-based Dove Clinic for Integrated Medicine we offer a novel approach, offering both conventional and complementary medicine for the treatment of CFS as well as other chronic illness.

Patients are offered an individually tailored regime of treatment based on measurements done in the clinic such as electrodermal testing which relies on making tiny electrical measurements over acupuncture points.

We also use Dark Field Microscopy which is a relatively new technique for looking at blood magnified 10,000 times in the living state.. From these pictures we can deduce a number of recommendations for the ongoing care of the patient.

Finally we have access to a range of laboratory blood tests to assess immune function, chronic viral load and vitamin and mineral status.

We believe the reason why chronic fatigue occurs in the first place relates to a failure of the immune system in some way. Our aim is to normalise immune function. Effective treatment will consist of several approaches all running concurrently.

Treatment usually includes dietary advice, nutritional supplements (oral or iv), homoeopathic remedies and herbal preparations, as well as conventional approaches.

We work out a diet specific to each patient; commonly it involves eliminating fat, sugar, additives, and animal protein and the increased consumption of

high fibre foods and the use of organic produce. There is considerable evidence to indicate that bad diet can be an important contributor to immune system dysfunction. There is also evidence that radical changes to dietary habits can aid the healing process

We also use activated Oxygen (Ozone, O₃), intravenously using a technique known as autohaemotherapy. This is commonly used in Germany, using EEC approved equipment. There is a large body of research literature on ozone showing that it stimulates immune function.

Although we don't offer any formal counselling, we are able to advise patients about where they can access the kind of mind body help that we feel will best suit the patient.

Our observations are that improved emotional functioning is an important part of improving immune function. Stress and emotional trauma often do contribute by producing immune system stress.

About the Dove Clinic for Integrated Medicine:

Founded by Dr Julian Kenyon MD MB ChB and staffed by a team of conventionally trained doctors and nurses, the clinic uses nutrition, homeopathy, herbal remedies and acupuncture as well as conventional medicines to treat a range of chronic illnesses including life threatening illness, nutritional disorders, IBS, chronic fatigue syndrome and hormonal imbalance.