

Managing Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



There is no known cure for post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS) or chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), although careful management may help to ease symptoms. Healthcare professionals can help to reduce some of the symptoms by having your GP prescribe medication and other therapies. However, some people face the challenge of living with these ongoing symptoms for some time.

There is good news in that we know that these symptoms can gradually improve in many people. We also know that learning ways to manage the condition can help people to make improvements. A team of professionals is needed for treatment, advice, support and counselling; that team very importantly should also include your family and close friends.

TREATING PVFS/CFS

There are a number of interventions that may be considered for PVFS/CFS.

1. Manage Your Symptoms with Medication

Medication can be used to manage your symptoms where possible, for example painkillers, anti-nausea medication and antidepressants.

2. Manage Your Quality of Life and Function

- **Sleep.** It is likely that you will be given advice about your sleep. Any changes to your sleep pattern (for example, having too little, or even too much, sleep) may actually make your tiredness (fatigue) worse. This includes sleeping in the daytime, which should ideally be avoided. Any changes to your sleep pattern should be done gradually.
- **Rest.** Setting aside times to rest (rather than actual sleep) is very beneficial. You

should introduce rest periods into your daily routine. These should ideally be limited to 30 minutes at a time and be a period of relaxation.

- **Relaxation.** Relaxation can help to improve pain, sleep problems and any stress or anxiety you may have. There are various relaxation techniques (such as guided visualisation or breathing techniques) which you may find useful when they are built into your rest periods.
- **Pacing.** This means balancing periods of activity and rest and becoming aware of which activities demand most from you. You should aim to stop activities before you feel the impact so that you have enough energy in reserve. Doing too much on a good day may make you feel the impact later. It can take time to change your usual activities but pacing is very important in managing your condition in the long term.
- **Diet.** It is very important that you have a well-balanced diet. You should try to avoid any foods and drinks to which you are sensitive. Eating small, regular meals that contain some starchy foods is often beneficial. Avoiding spikes and drops in blood sugar will help manage your energy levels and make you feel more settled.

3. Physical Activity and Exercise

Some people find that carefully adding some physical activity into their PVFS/CFS management plan can be beneficial. If you feel ready to try this, you should follow a personalised activity programme overseen by a professional in a specialist ME/CVFS team.

4. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a talking therapy that can help you

manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave. It's most commonly used to help with anxiety and depression but can be useful for other mental and physical health problems.

5. Manage Your Mental Health

Counselling and support groups can be used to help manage your mental health.

6. General Support

Depending on the severity of illness, other support may be needed – for example, carers, nursing support, equipment and adaptations to the home to help overcome disability.

If you are employed, your doctor will be able to advise you about whether you should take time off work; and, if you take time off work, when you may be ready to go back to work. It may be that you need to work doing slightly different hours or even with different duties. If you have an occupational health department at work, they are likely to be involved with you also regarding work and going back to work if you take time off.

7. Manage Setbacks or Relapses

It can be common to have setbacks when symptoms become worse for a while. These can have various triggers – for example, poor sleep, infection or stress.

Your doctor may discuss with you strategies which may help during a setback. These may include relaxation techniques, talking with your family, and finding the right balance between activity and rest, if possible. However, it may be necessary for you to reduce or even stop some of your activities and increase the amount of rest you have during a setback.

Following a setback you should usually be able gradually to return to your previous activity level.

The information contained in this article is intended as general guidance and information only and should not be relied upon as a basis for planning individual medical care or as a substitute for specialist medical advice in each individual case. ©Co-Kinetic 2021