



Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

CFS is not a single diagnosis or disease as no single cause has been discovered. It is defined by symptoms and by eliminating other known causes of fatigue by taking a history and doing a thorough physical examination.

Suggested causes include chronic viral infections, food allergy, adrenal gland dysfunction, and many others. None of these have been convincingly documented in more than a minority of sufferers.

Definition: disabling fatigue lasting more than six months, reducing activity by more than half. Some may also have difficulty sleeping, swollen lymph nodes, and/or mild fever. When there is muscle soreness, fibromyalgia may be the actual problem. Although CFS is considered a modern diagnosis, it may have existed for centuries under other names, such as "the vapors," neurasthenia, "effort syndrome" (diagnosed in World War I veterans), hypoglycemia, and chronic mononucleosis.

Lifestyle changes:

- Exercise on a regular basis is important to prevent worsening of fatigue. Many patients report feeling better after undertaking a moderate exercise plan.
- Highly stressful situations should be avoided. Coping mechanisms for dealing with stress can sometimes be maximized by behavioral therapy.³

Helpful Dietary changes: In those people with CFS who have low blood pressure, salt should not be restricted, and a salt added diet may be beneficial, as can addition of regular doses of arthritis medications like ibuprofen which may help retain salt and water in the body.

Helpful Nutritional supplements: Potassium-magnesium aspartate has shown benefits for chronically fatigued persons in several studies.^{4,5} Usually 1 gram is taken twice per day. Results have been reported within one to two weeks.

Magnesium levels have been reported to be low in CFS sufferers.⁶ Supplementing magnesium improved symptoms in some people with low magnesium levels, although magnesium injections were also sometimes necessary.⁷ Not all studies have found low magnesium levels in people with CFS.⁸ Taking too much magnesium often leads to diarrhea, this can happen at

doses as low as 350–500 mg per day. People with kidney disease should not take magnesium supplements without consulting a physician.

Carnitine is required for energy production in the powerhouses of the cells (the mitochondria). There may be a problem in the mitochondria in people with CFS. Deficiency of carnitine has been seen in some CFS sufferers.⁹ One gram of carnitine three times daily led to improvement in CFS symptoms in a recent investigation.¹⁰

Preliminary research suggests that NADH may also help people with chronic fatigue syndrome.¹¹

Helpful Herbs: Recent research has identified an inability of many people with CFS to maintain normal blood pressure.¹² The problem appears to lie in the nervous system. Licorice that contains glycyrrhizin (as opposed to DGL type licorice) can occasionally cause an elevation of blood pressure by causing water retention if used in high enough amounts. For this reason it is now being recommended for people with CFS and low blood pressure. A case study has reported that taking 2.5 grams of licorice each day helped one patient who did not respond to any other therapy.¹³ Such a course should only be undertaken with help from a properly trained health care professional, given its complexity and potential dangers.

Eleuthero has been used historically to provide energy and vitality. Recent evidence also suggests that eleuthero may prove valuable in the long-term management of various diseases of the immune system including chronic fatigue syndrome. Eleuthero may cause insomnia as well as a mild, transient diarrhea in some people.

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