

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME)

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is a long-term illness with a wide range of symptoms. The most common symptom is extreme tiredness.

CFS is also known as ME, which stands for myalgic encephalomyelitis. There's some debate over the correct term to use for the condition, but these pages will refer to it as CFS/ME.

CFS/ME can affect anyone, including children. It's more common in women, and tends to develop between your mid-20s and mid-40s.

Symptoms of CFS/ME

The main symptom of CFS/ME is feeling extremely tired and generally unwell. In addition, people with CFS/ME may have other symptoms, including:

- sleep problems
- muscle or joint pain
- [headaches](#)
- a [sore throat](#) or sore glands that aren't swollen
- problems thinking, remembering or concentrating
- [flu-like symptoms](#)
- feeling dizzy or sick
- fast or irregular heartbeats ([heart palpitations](#))

Most people find overexercising makes their symptoms worse. The severity of symptoms can vary from day to day, or even within a day. The symptoms of CFS/ME are similar to the symptoms of some other illnesses, so it's important to see your GP to get a correct diagnosis.

Read more about the [symptoms of CFS/ME](#).

Diagnosing CFS/ME

There isn't a specific test for CFS/ME, so it's diagnosed based on your symptoms and by ruling out other conditions that could be causing your symptoms. Your GP will ask about your symptoms and medical history. You may also have blood and urine tests.

As the symptoms of CFS/ME are similar to those of many common illnesses that usually get better on their own, a diagnosis of CFS/ME may be considered if you don't get better as quickly as expected.

Read more about [diagnosing CFS/ME](#).

Treating CFS/ME

Treatment for CFS/ME aims to relieve the symptoms. Your treatment will depend on how CFS/ME is affecting you.

Treatments include:

- [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#)
- a structured exercise programme called [graded exercise therapy \(GET\)](#)
- [medication](#) to control pain, nausea and sleeping problems

Most people with CFS get better over time, although some people don't make a full recovery. It's also likely there will be periods when your symptoms get better or worse. Children and young people with CFS/ME are more likely to recover fully.

Read more about [treating CFS/ME](#).

Causes of CFS/ME

It's not known what causes CFS/ME, but there are a number of theories – for example, it may be triggered by an infection, or certain factors could make you more likely to develop the illness.

Suggested causes or triggers for CFS/ME include:

- viral infections, such as [glandular fever](#)
- bacterial infections, such as [pneumonia](#)
- problems with the immune system
- a hormone imbalance
- mental health problems, such as stress, [depression](#) and emotional trauma
- your genes – CFS/ME seems to be more common in some families

Living with CFS/ME

Living with CFS/ME can be difficult. Extreme tiredness and other physical symptoms can make it hard to carry out everyday activities. You may have to make some major lifestyle changes. CFS/ME can also affect your mental and emotional health, and have a negative effect on your self-esteem.

As well as asking your family and friends for support, you may find it useful to talk to other people with CFS/ME.

[ME Association](#) is a charity that provides information, support and practical advice for people affected by the condition. You can [find a local support group](#) on their website

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