

The Road to Healthy Aging

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

“Is It All in Your Head?”

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a Real condition! It is probably one of the most under diagnosed conditions in this country. Estimates are that more than 12 million people in the U.S. with this condition, and that there are 6-12 million people with Fibromyalgia. It is a condition that is difficult to diagnose since there are so many random complaints by patients that do not fit into a nice little picture. 75% of patients are female, however more men are developing this syndrome. Sadly, there is not much awareness on the part of the medical community as to how to diagnose CFS. Once it is diagnosed, doctors are often at a loss of how to treat this, and many consider this to be a “wastebasket” diagnosis. Others simply dismiss the symptoms as a psychiatric condition. This is a disservice to the 4-7% of the population who suffer from condition.

So what are the most common complaints that might suggest this illness? First and foremost, is a profound fatigue and exhaustion that lasts more than 6 months. Achiness and flu like symptoms are most common. This exhaustion has nothing to do with exertion, and if you do exert yourself or overdo your physical activity, it can take several days to recover. Our cells are our energy banks, and the mitochondria are the energy producers of the cell. If the mitochondria are not working properly, cells and tissues are starved of energy, and this may be the common endpoint of all dysfunction in CFS and Fibromyalgia. If you overdraw at the bank, your reserves are depleted and exhaustion sets in.

Another associated symptom with CFS is disordered sleep. Do you find that you are exhausted in the morning and can't get out of bed? Do you sleep 10-14 hours and are still tired? Your day goes downhill from there. Pain issues, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea can all affect your quality of sleep and must be addressed in order to begin healing. You gain 30% more energy by simply getting good quality sleep.

Body aches and muscle pain also accompanies CFS. Patients complain of generalized soreness throughout the body which can wax and wane in intensity. Fibromyalgia, which is a “branch off of the same tree” as CFS, has many of the same symptoms. However the pain with Fibromyalgia is deep, and down to the bone, which can be excruciating. A Tenderpoint exam is helpful in making this diagnosis. The more pain one has, the more fatigue one has. Therefore, it is critical that there be adequate pain control which would involve medications and supplements

together with alternative treatments such as acupuncture, yoga, Tai Chi, massage and physical therapy. Infrared saunas can also be invaluable in helping to alleviate the discomfort.

Brain Fog associated with CFS is a disturbing symptom which can impair your ability to work and be productive. Difficulty staying on task, getting easily distracted, short term memory loss, word retrieval, and name recall is difficult as well. It is interesting to note, that 70% of the neurotransmitters in the brain which facilitate your cognitive functioning, originate in the gut. Therefore, it is imperative the gut health be optimal in order to improve your thinking process.

Proper gut Health and nutrition are frequently impaired in patients with CFS and Fibromyalgia. Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Leaky Gut, food and multiple chemical sensitivities are extremely common and often overlooked. This is often the primary and overwhelming complaint for many patients. As mentioned in previous articles, if the gut doesn't work, NOTHING works. Optimal nutrition, and maintaining healthy gut flora is the first step in a long process.

It has been well documented that there is an immune dysfunction associated with CFS. Some people get sick all the time, and other individuals simply complain of persistent and profound fatigue. You can feel well for weeks or months at a time, and then crash for no particular reason, and these symptoms are typically cyclical. Immune dysfunction allows infections to flourish. These infections can include EBV (Epstein Barr Virus), CMV (Cytomegalovirus), HHV6, Lyme Disease and bacterial infections such as Chlamydia and Mycoplasma Pneumonia. Treatment of these infections can be extremely beneficial.

So what are the main triggers of CFS? Often it is some kind of trauma; an accident or an illness you never recovered from; for example having mono as a child, divorce issues, financial issues, or working 60-80 hours a week. Extreme fatigue has been reported within months of delivering a baby. The bottom line is that stress is a primary factor whether it be emotional or physical. The more stress one has, the more it impacts your quality of life. Dealing with these stressors is critical in the treatment process.

To date, there is no clear cause of CFS and Fibromyalgia, but research is ongoing. Increasing cellular energy is paramount, and this can be done through supplements, improving your quality of sleep, hormonal balancing, improving gut health, nutrition, treating various infections associated with this condition, and stress management. Therefore, a multi-system approach to treatment is becoming the standard of care. You need to know that you CAN have a better quality of life, spend more time with family and friends, and be much more productive. There is hope!!

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