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FACING FATIGUE

The sole purpose of this booklet is to provide information from an Ayurvedic perspective. This information is not intended for use in the diagnosis, treatment, cure or prevention of any disease. If you have any serious acute or chronic health concern, please consult a health professional. If you are seeking for medical advises or you have any queries, our Doctors will be happy to guide you. Check with your Doctor before taking herbs / medicines or following the diet when pregnant or nursing.

“Fatigue is what we experience, but it is what a match is to an atomic bomb.”— Laura Hillenbrand, Writer

What it means to suddenly move from being a healthy, productive member of society to being severely limited. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome(CFS) can be a severely disabling and chronic condition which has a serious impact on your daily life, work and activities – often made worse by the prejudice and disbelief which surrounds this complex disorder.

CFS is a complicated disorder characterized by extreme fatigue that can't be explained by any underlying medical condition. The fatigue may worsen with physical or mental activity, but doesn't improve with rest.

This condition is also known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) a term which relates to the parts of the body affected: MYALGIC, the muscles; ENCEPHALO, the brain; and MYELITIS, the nerves.

What is It Like Living with CFS?

Until recently, many people suffering from this had great difficulty in finding a diagnosis and way of dealing effectively with their chronic fatigue; as well as the common symptoms-boredom, the feeling of low self-worth, exhaustion, and the craving for comfort foods.



The severity varies greatly from patient to patient, with some people able to maintain fairly active lives. For others, it has a profound impact. About 25 percent of people are disabled by the illness and there is often a pattern of relapse and remission. Most symptoms are invisible to others, which makes it difficult for family members, friends and the public to understand the condition.

More severe patients have been found to be more functionally impaired than those with other disabling illnesses such as Type-II Diabetes, Congestive Heart Failure, Hypertension, Depression, Multiple Sclerosis, and end-stage Renal Disease.

We have observed that; People have often enjoyed good health before coming down with a range of symptoms which suggest a change in brain function which can cause loss of concentration and short-term memory; dyslexia, nausea, clumsiness and disturbed balance. The primary characteristics of the illness are a profound, unrelenting loss of energy that is not relieved by rest; post-exertional malaise, which is a worsening of all symptoms following minimal mental or physical exertion; sleep disorder; cognitive impairment resulting in slowed processing of information, reduced focus and attention, and pain.

Most important point is how to treat the patients and how to prevent this disorder. Like all chronic health disorders, with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, there is no aspect of life that goes untouched by the impact. Not only is their energy zapped, but so is their self-esteem and self-image as they lose their ability to engage in the world as they desire and feel productive.

“Don’t tell me, “You don’t look sick!” You don’t look that insensitive either!”— Anonymous

Ayurvedic Perspective

The approach to any disease in Ayurveda is very unique. Rather than focusing on the disease alone, the person as a whole is taken into consideration. Ayurvedic medical system recognizes and intricately describes these seemingly very modern conditions of fatigue and immune depletion. CFS, ‘A disease of Depletion’ is found in the classical texts described under the ‘Vata disorder’.



Ayurveda offers an in-depth understanding of the development of these pathologies and a clear path to recovery.

The Disease Process In Ayurveda

“This occurs in the same way how mud or debris clogs up and obstructs a channel irrigation system in a field. If the channels are blocked and the water can’t get through then eventually the fields (where Ojas* is ‘grown’) will dry up.”

When it comes to the cause of these conditions, there are several important factors to mention. The first, as with all pathologies, is compromised digestion. When our digestion is not working well and has become imbalanced, Ama- undigested matter / toxin is formed. Once it is present, this causes further digestive problems such as bloating, pain, gas, constipation or diarrhoea and also moves from the gut into the channels of circulation causing obstructions. This impedes the flow of nutrients, wastes and hormones around the body and hampers the metabolism of healthy tissues.

The second factor is the aggravation of doshas: Vata and Pitta. This occurs due to various causative factors. Along with the Ama that is produced, Vata and Pitta doshas also become imbalanced and begin to exert their influence on the tissues of the body, contributing to pain, stiffness, fatigue and many of the other symptoms that are associated with CFS.

Over time, the metabolism of all the tissues is compromised and the final stage in the pathology becomes involved. Ojas (which is considered the final essence of tissue metabolism and the primary support for our immune system) is gradually depleted.

The presenting symptoms of depleting Ojas however, are those of a psychological nature, such as fear, anxiety, anger, grief and trauma. They all have opposite properties to the qualities of Ojas and very quickly cause it to lose its nectar-like, life supporting properties. This depletion is exacerbated by many factors including eating too much dry and cold food (including processed food or too much raw food), lack of restful sleep, excessive talking and sensory stimulation, too much mass media, overly strenuous exercise, overwork, travel, excessive fasting or sudden weight loss.

“It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.” Confucius

Signs and Symptoms

Usually there are wide range of symptoms in which a core set of symptoms affect nearly everyone. Some of them are as below:-

- Extreme exhaustion
- Non-restorative sleep
- Brain fog/cognitive impairment
- Joint pain
- Inflamed lymph nodes
- Persistent sore throat
- Severe headache
- Neurological abnormalities
- Complete organ system shutdown

- Sensitivity to light, sound, odours, chemicals, certain food and medications
- Irritability, depression, and mood swings

Risk Factors

CFS occurs in both sexes, at all ages, and in all racial and ethnic groups.

Age and Gender

People who are in their 40s and 50s most often experience chronic fatigue. Studies have found that four out of five people with CFS are women, although women do not appear to have more severe symptoms than men with the disorder.



Children and adolescents can also have CFS, although it is less common than in adults. Most studies indicate that girls are more likely than boys to develop CFS.

Depression and Psychological Factors

The link between psychological disorders and chronic fatigue syndrome is problematic because so many of the symptoms overlap. The rates of depression are very high in CFS patients, possibly higher than in patients with other conditions (notably Fibromyalgia and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity).



Depression can lead to suicide, which explains the increased suicide rate in people. For this reason, depression should be diagnosed and treated promptly in patients with CFS.

Studies report that most children and adolescents with CFS have psychiatric disorders. Psychological factors in childhood may increase the risk of developing CFS later in life.

No one yet knows what causes C.F.S., but it often begins at the time of an acute infection and researchers are looking into the possibility of it being linked to certain common viruses. There is also speculation that certain neurotoxins such as pesticides could trigger C.F.S., while physicians recognize that psychological and emotional states may also have an influence.

Stress

Most people know that stress and emotional trauma can affect their health. But what is not widely known is how stress can become a major culprit that lead to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Unresolved emotional and mental stress that lingers on causes a huge energy drain in the mind and body. All bodily mechanisms that run 24 x 7 require various energy levels, and our mind is not even aware of the deeper underlying stresses that the human body has to put up with, in order to keep a balance.

People who had experienced trauma during childhood including sexual and emotional abuse are more likely to develop CFS. Researchers say the stress of abuse may trigger the condition through

its effects on the central nervous system, immune system, and neuro-endocrine system (which is related to both nerves and hormones). However, most people who experience childhood trauma do not go on to develop CFS.

A Baffling CFS!!!

A number of conditions overlap or coexist with chronic fatigue syndrome and have similar symptoms. Patients with CFS may also have a diagnosis of Fibromyalgia, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, or both. It is not clear whether these and other conditions are risk factors for CFS, are direct causes, have common causes, or have no relationship at all with CFS.

Fibromyalgia: Fibromyalgia causes prolonged fatigue and widespread muscle aches. It is the disease most often confused with CFS. The two conditions may also appear together. In fact, many experts believe that Fibromyalgia and CFS are different forms of the same condition. Up to 30% of children diagnosed with CFS may also have fibromyalgia.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) is a condition in which certain chemicals appear to cause symptoms similar to those of CFS. MCS has also been observed in people with CFS. The following criteria can help identify MCS:

- The symptoms occur whenever the person is exposed to a chemical. These are chemicals commonly found in popular products, such as perfumes, fabric softeners, and air fresheners.

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- The condition is chronic.
 - Symptoms can be produced by exposure to the chemical at levels lower than that the person tolerated in the past.
 - The symptoms improve when the chemical is removed.
 - Symptoms can be triggered by multiple substances that are chemically unrelated.
 - Symptoms involve more than one organ system.

As with CFS and fibromyalgia, there is a debate as to whether MCS is a specific medical condition or is psychologically based. Everyone is exposed to many chemicals on a daily basis, and it is very difficult to determine whether chemicals are responsible for specific symptoms.

Eating Disorders. Eating disorders, notably Bulimia and Anorexia, have been observed in patients with CFS. The conditions often have overlapping risk factors, although it is unclear whether one causes the other.

Getting over C.F.S. can be a long, slow process taking several years and involving relapses, but it is possible to recover in time. However, some people merely show some improvement while a minority never get over their symptoms and become invalids.

Other Conditions that Commonly Coexist With CFS. The following conditions also may occur along with CFS and are more common in CFS patients than in healthy people:

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- Chronic headaches
 - Cognitive problems such as difficulty concentrating, impaired memory, and symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
 - Interstitial cystitis
 - Irritable bowel syndrome
 - Sleep problems
 - Temporomandibular disorder (TMD)

Complications

Possible complications include:

- Depression
- Social isolation
- Lifestyle restrictions
- Increased work absences

“You just do it. You force yourself to get up. You force yourself to put one foot before the other, you refuse to let it get to you. You fight. You cry. You curse. Then you go about the business of living. That’s how I’ve done it. There’s no other way.”

- Elizabeth Taylor

Treatment

In our experience; patients who stay as active as possible and try to have some control over their disorder have the best chance for improvement. It is important for patients to choose physicians who think of CFS as a medical condition with psychiatric components.

The aim of treatment in Ayurveda is to address the disease process at the deepest level - by strengthening and balancing Agni, removing Ama, pacifying and eliminating excess doshas and nourishing Ojas. Simultaneously it is very important to detoxify; address the channels of circulation causing obstruction

Ayurveda treatment for C.F.S. begins with Panchakarma, which include “purification” and “rehabilitation”.

The aim is to restore balance or “homeostasis” of the body. Oral medicines are prescribed to improve the metabolism and balance the doshas or vital forces, which control the structural and functional aspects of the body. In our Centres we also follow; Specific body treatments excellent for relieving pain, swelling and inflammation. Sirodhara is excellent for calming the mind and emotions, balancing hormones and relieving symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, headaches and palpitations.



A balanced diet and healthy lifestyle also have an important role to play and given the chronic nature of these conditions. In our experience; the most important thing however, is the way how these aspects of treatment are carried out. Ayurvedic treatment takes time, especially with chronic conditions. All aspects of treatment should therefore be done with warmth, patience, consistency and regularity.

Drugs, diet and regimens which promote longevity by delaying ageing and preventing diseases are called Rasayanam (Rejuvenative). As the condition requires a long term approach, administration of Rasayana will fortify the results as it improves the general well being of the person and immunity; thus the quality of life.

We feel that a treatment course of four weeks is found to be ideal, followed by internal medications. Periodic repetition based on the response from the initial course of treatments will be more beneficial.

Health requires healthy food and a positive lifestyle!!!!

Diet and lifestyle are the foundations. Follow a warm nourishing diet that supports the digestive fire, healthy tissue development and balances the doshas. Without this, all other aspects of treatments are less beneficial.

Although there is no evidence that any specific food influence CFS, it's always a good idea to eat a healthy diet that includes:

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- Take food at regular intervals.
 - Food should be freshly prepared
 - Fast foods, preservatives, left over or foods of little nutritional value should be avoided.
 - Always take a warm cooked meal
 - Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol, chocolate and cola, all white flour products, sugar, food colorings, chemical additives, white rice and strong condiments. The diet should be restricted to three meals.
 - Fruits, milk, a handful of nuts and seeds or cereals can be taken for breakfast.
 - Steamed or cooked vegetables, food prepared from wheat and a glass of buttermilk can be taken for lunch.
 - For dinner, green vegetable salad, available sprouts like alfalfa seeds, green gram seeds can be taken
 - Mutton, fish, chicken may be fine but in small amounts.
 - Include ghee in your daily diet, But individual with high cholesterol level should restrict ghee in the diet
 - Reduce cold, dry, spicy ,bitter and astringent food
 - Take dairy products in small quantities
 - Sweets, sour or heavy fruits such as bananas, avacados, grapes, oranges, cherries, peaches, mangoes, papayas, melons, berries plums and pineapples are good

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- Cinnamon, black pepper, ginger, cardamom, cumin, salt, cloves and mustard seeds can be added while cooking
 - Plenty of fresh, dark-coloured fruits and vegetables, which are rich in antioxidants
 - Limited saturated fats (found in animal products)
 - Omega-3 essential fatty acids, found in certain fish and oils
 - Try to start the day with a glass of warm water or ginger water

Appropriate lifestyle practices (including the right sort of exercise) should be adopted in order to calm the mind and support the nervous system, whilst at the same time promoting good digestion and circulation. Balancing your time between activity, rest, and sleep is very important

Wake up early, keep regular time for wake up and sleep. Take a warm water bath after a massage with sesame oil. Engage in calm activities, avoid wind and cold outdoors and try to keep yourself warm.

C.F.S. can hit at anytime, whatever your age or background, and although it most commonly starts between the ages of 20 and 40, children as young as seven can be affected.

Minding the mind!!!

However, the most difficult complications of CFS are those that affect the mind. Feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness are

incredibly common due to the isolating nature of the conditions and as they become more prevalent they feed straight back into the disease process by having a direct depleting effect on Ojas.

Yoga and Meditation

Ayurvedic treatments help a great deal on this front, this is where the practices of mindfulness and meditation are extremely beneficial. More and more, scientific studies are showing the tremendous benefit of mindfulness practices for anxiety, depression and strengthening the immune system. The intimate link between the physical and psychological elements of these conditions means that these practices should be an integral part of treatment.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

The power of the mind to improve health problems is significant and treatments that promote a positive outlook are beneficial for any disease, including CFS.

The primary goal of CBT is to change any distorted perceptions patients have of the world and of themselves, so they can change their behavior accordingly. This means learning to think differently about fatigue, improving their ability to deal with stressful situations, and better managing their disorder. CBT can also help manage sleep problems and regulate activity levels. Cognitive therapy is particularly helpful for defining and setting limits, behaviors that are extremely important for CFS patients.

The complexities of the chronic fatigue syndrome and the methodologic problems associated indicate the need for a comprehensive, systematic, and integrated approach to the evaluation, classification, and study of persons with this condition and other fatiguing illnesses. The assessment and treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome should be multidimensional and tailored to the needs of the individual patient.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. - James Baldwin



***Florence Nightingale** is the celebrated **patron** saint for those who suffer from **Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)**. **Nightingale** is lauded for her role as a nurse for wounded British soldiers during the Crimean War. Few realise, however, that from 1857 she was disabled by poor health, which many now believe was **CFS**.*

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES



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