

Post Viral Fatigue:

Information and guidance



Pride in our older people's and adult community services

Introduction

This booklet aims to provide fatigue management advice to help people after an illness, such as Covid-19 infection, to try and manage and reduce the fatigue that they may be experiencing. Fatigue can interfere with every aspect of day to day life so learning how to cope with it, and feeling confident with helpful strategies, may help to reduce its impact.

The booklet also provides information on next steps should fatigue symptoms continue and not improve.

Advice on Fatigue Management

The British Association for CFS/ME (BACME) has written '**Post-Viral Fatigue A Guide to Management**'. The booklet provides guidance on strategies to help manage fatigue during the infection and steps to take to help with recovery. Available at:

<https://www.bacme.info/sites/bacme.info/files/BACME%20Post%20Viral%20Fatigue%20A%20Guide%20to%20Management%20May2020.pdf>

The ME Association has written **Post-viral fatigue (PVF) and Post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS) following coronavirus infection**. It provides an overview of symptoms and management of post viral fatigue (PVF), post viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS) and research into PVF and PVFS. Available at:

<https://www.meassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/MEA-PVF-and-PVFS-Following-Coronavirus-Infection-30.04.20.pdf>

Managing Fatigue

As highlighted in the BACME and ME Association guidelines, sleep, rest/relaxation, nutrition, keeping active and mental wellbeing are important areas to focus on when managing fatigue. There are many websites and apps offering general advice and guidance in these areas. Listed below are some examples of websites and apps which you may find helpful:

Websites

Sleep Foundation: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/healthy-sleep-tips>

How to Get to Sleep: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>

Relaxation Techniques: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/relax.htm>

What is Mindfulness?: <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness>

Every Mind Matters: Eat better, sleep better, move more, manage stress and low mood: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>

Apps

- Calm: <https://www.calm.com/>
- Headspace: www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app
- Insight Timer: <https://insighttimer.com/>
- Easy Meals: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/apps/>

Mental Wellbeing

If mood problems are persisting and impacting on everyday life, then speak to your GP to get further support and help. You can also self-refer online to:

Insight Healthcare: <https://www.insighthealthcare.org>

Psychological Wellbeing Service:

<https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/pws/psychological-wellbeing-service.htm>

Next Steps

Good basic management of post infection fatigue may lessen the chances of this turning into a more permanent and debilitating illness. However, if symptoms are not improving:

Seek Advice

Ask your GP for advice so that they can check that there are not any other causes for the symptoms.

Could I have CFS/ME?

Most people who experience prolonged fatigue after an infection will make a full recovery. However, some people will go on to experience significant fatigue for a long time and may also develop lots of additional symptoms alongside the fatigue. In a small number of people, post-viral fatigue can develop into a longer-term or chronic illness known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS).

This is a condition which results in a wide array of symptoms, including severe fatigue, which can cause significant changes in someone's life, often meaning they are unable to work or attend school, cannot engage in social activities and may struggle with activities of daily living.

Recovery from ME/CFS is variable and some people continue to have symptoms for many years. The risk factors for developing ME/CFS are still not clearly understood and may include some genetic factors. ME/CFS does not always start following an illness, however, it is a common pattern to see people develop ME/CFS following an infection that occurs at a time of high demand in their life.

One of the key symptoms that occurs in people with ME/CFS is Post-Exertional Malaise or PEM. This is when there is an increase in fatigue, along with flu-like symptoms in response to activity. The activity that provokes this escalation can be simple everyday tasks including cognitive activities as well as physical activity. The increase in fatigue is commonly delayed by 24 hours or more, so a typical pattern is for someone to try to do a bit more on a good day and then wake the next day feeling much worse, often with a sore throat or sore glands and generalized achiness.

As well as post-exertional malaise, people with ME/CFS develop a lot of additional symptoms with different patterns occurring in different people. Some people develop

poor standing tolerance which means doing tasks while standing still (e.g. showering or washing up), can cause a rapid increase in fatigue or pain and result in them feeling the need to sit or lie down. There may also be palpitations, problems with regulating body temperature and sweating.

'Brain fog' is a common feature of ME/CFS and is where people feel mentally fatigued and struggle to concentrate. They often report forgetfulness and difficulty finding the right words when speaking or struggling to keep track during a conversation. It is common for people with ME/CFS to experience some change in their digestion, such as reduced appetite, nausea, acid reflux or bowel changes and irritable bowel type symptoms.

Some people with ME/CFS develop new sensitivities to bright lights, noise, chemicals, medications, and alcohol. Some people with ME/CFS also experience pain symptoms in joints or muscles along with headaches. When someone has this pattern of symptoms, it is important that tests are done to check for underlying conditions that could be causing them. For some people that will just be blood tests done by their GP. For other people, it may involve referrals to hospital for specialist opinions or investigations. This means the process of making a diagnosis of ME/CFS can take some time. It can be helpful to follow the management strategies given in this guide while waiting for tests to be done.

Specialist Input

If you continue to experience high levels of fatigue, then the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Specialist ME/CFS services or chronic fatigue services may be available to provide further guidance.

Self-help information booklets are available for download from the CFS/ME website: <https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-and-myalgic-encephalomyelitis.htm>

If appropriate, your GP will be able to discuss referral options with you to our service.

Adult ME/CFS Service

Tel: 0330 7260077

Press 2 for Huntingdon area
Press 3 for East Cambs and Fenland area
Press 4 for Peterborough area
Press 5 for Cambridge area

Email: cpm-tr.cfsme@nhs.net

Website: <https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-and-myalgic-encephalomyelitis.htm>

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service

For information about CPFT services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on Freephone 0800 376 0775, or e-mail pals@cpft.nhs.uk

Out-of-hours service for CPFT mental health service users

Please call **NHS 111** for health advice and support.

If you require this information in another format such as braille, large print or another language, please let us know.

CPFT supports the **HeadtoToe Charity** – visit www.HeadToToeCharity.org for details on how you can help



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