



CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME & FIBROMYALGIA

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Fatigue is normal. Exhaustion is normal. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a sickness. It is the way you feel on about the third day of a really bad cold or the flu: zero energy, no stamina, incredible weakness, and pain. Unlike having a cold or the flu, though, you feel that way every day. There are additional symptoms that vary from one sufferer to the other, and every sufferer has at least one of the following: upper respiratory problems, swollen glands, or headaches. Contrary to what some people might think, chronic fatigue syndrome is not about hormones, lifestyle, or an overactive imagination.

A significant number of patients with CFS are diagnosed with Chronic Lyme Disease and respond well to long-term antibiotics.

Chronic fatigue is often seen together with other conditions, namely, fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) pain, and multiple chemical sensitivity syndrome.

SLEEP AND FIBROMYALGIA FATIGUE

Fibromyalgia is a syndrome characterized by fatigue and chronic pain in the muscles and joints. Asked which of the symptoms was most significant to them, more patients chose lack of energy.

According to Dr. Mary Rose, an expert in fibromyalgia, improving a patient's sleep is an important part of easing fibromyalgia fatigue. "We know from research that sleep improves mood, pain, and in general how people feel during the day. Regardless of the reasons for the chronic fatigue, if we can get some control over quality of sleep, we're likely to see positive benefits to mood, fatigue, concentration."

The chronic lack of refreshing sleep affects a patient's overall health as well as their pain, Rose adds. "They feel lousy, exhausted, and their immune system can be damaged."

Steven Berney, MD, chief of rheumatology at Temple University Health System in Philadelphia, agrees. "In fibromyalgia, all treatments are geared toward helping people sleep better. If we can improve their sleep, patients will get better."

LIVING WITH FIBROMYALGIA

Sleeping pills aren't the answer, says Dr. Rose, because they are not intended for chronic long-term use.

Indeed, living with fibromyalgia is more than just popping a pill, says Martin Grabois, MD, Chairman of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "A good deal is self-treatment. Patients have to be active, not passive."

An overnight at-home sleep study by your medical doctor to identify sleep problems could be the first step to recovery.

The main symptom of CFS is extreme tiredness (fatigue) which:

- Is new
- Lasts at least six months
- Is not relieved by bed rest; meaning, a good night's sleep does little to relieve the bone-aching, flu-like tiredness
- Is severe enough to keep you from participating in certain activities.

In many cases, CFS is accompanied by joint pain (but without swelling or redness), upper respiratory problems, swollen glands or headaches.

Young patients with CFS complain of severe fatigue, poor concentration and various aches and pains, despite 10 to 12 hours of sleep. In many of these patients, the sleep physicians find that their airway is extremely narrowed, leading to frequent obstructions and arousals during deep sleep that prevents them from being able to benefit from true deep sleep. This condition is called UARS - Upper Airway Resistance syndrome.

In older patients, chronic sleep deprivation may contribute to the buildup in the brain of beta-amyloid plaques—the clumps of protein seen in Alzheimer's disease. Dr. David Holtzman and colleagues from Washington University in St. Louis found that the levels of the amyloid protein appeared to fluctuate daily, and levels of the protein were significantly higher during sleep deprivation. "The main thing this study implies is that disorders of sleep might predispose you to get Alzheimer's disease later in life," Holtzman says.

Among older women, those with sleep-disordered breathing were shown to have an increased risk of developing cognitive impairment such as dementia and Alzheimer's.