



Wellness News Network™

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Alternative Approaches to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome CFS

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Introduction

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) involves more than simply feeling weary, tired or without energy. CFS is an often debilitating and complex health problem associated with profound fatigue and it does not improve with bed rest and may be made worse with activity (either physical or mental). In many cases, CFS symptoms affect multiple body symptoms, which results in a significantly reduced quality of life and an inability to participate in activities of daily living.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health, it is thought that at least 1 million people in the United States have CFS, though less than 20 percent of these cases have been diagnosed.¹ A 2003 study published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine* states that chronic fatigue syndrome is a major public health problem.² In this edition of the Wellness News Network, we will



review the possible causes, risk factors and symptoms of this widespread and life-altering condition. We will also review conventional and alternative approaches to CFS as well as the role of chiropractic in treating this health problem.

Causes, Risk Factors, and Symptoms

CFS is a mysterious health problem whose underlying cause is not yet known to scientists and physicians. Some believe that CFS is caused by a combination of factors that affect individuals born with a predisposition for this condition. According to the Mayo Clinic, key factors that may cause CFS include: viral infections (e.g., Epstein-Barr, human herpesvirus 6, mouse leukemia viruses), immune system impairment, and hormonal imbalances.³

Factors that may boost your risk for CFS include:

- **Age:** CFS tends to affect individuals between the ages of 40 and 50.
- **Sex:** Women are much more likely than men to develop CFS (though women may be more likely to seek medical help for this problem, which may skew the data).
- **Lifestyle:** CFS tends to arise more frequently in individuals who are overweight and sedentary.

QUESTION:

What factors may boost your risk for CFS?

- A) Age range of 40 to 50
- B) Overweight
- C) Sedentary
- D) All of the above

ANSWER:

D) All of the above

TRUE OR FALSE:

Men tend to develop CFS more than women

ANSWER:

False

QUESTION:

What are some alternative treatments for CFS?

- A) Decrease stress
- B) Improve your sleep pattern
- C) Keep activity levels balanced
- D) All of the above

ANSWER:

D) All of the above

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Some of the most common symptoms associated with CFS include: profound fatigue, inability to concentrate, memory loss, sore throat, random muscle pain, neck and armpit lymph node enlargement, pain that migrates from one joint to another, headache, sleep that fails to rejuvenate and extreme exhaustion (for a full day or more) after physical or mental activity.

Conventional Treatments

CFS has historically been treated with a combination of medications (e.g., antidepressants, sleeping pills), graded exercise and psychological counseling. The medications are intended to address any underlying depression, improve sleep and reduce pain or discomfort. Graded exercise helps restore strength and endurance gradually, in a way that is not depleting. Psychological counseling is often recommended by physicians to help CFS patients regain a sense of control, which can significantly improve the outlook of a person with this disorder.

Alternative Approaches

A helpful alternative approach to CFS may involve a combination of dietary measures, self-care activities and complementary healthcare services.

Certain nutritional deficiencies may play a role in CFS. According to a 2000 study published in the journal *Alternative Medicine Review*, deficiencies in the any or all the following nutrients may contribute to CFS symptoms and impede the healing process: various B vitamins, vitamin C, magnesium, sodium, zinc, L-tryptophan, L-carnitine, coenzyme Q10 and essential fatty acids.⁴

Self-care activities that may be helpful in treating CFS include:

- **Decreasing Stress:** Creating a plan to minimize emotional turmoil and stress is a useful self-care measure in treating CFS. Daily relaxation practices are key.

- **Improving Sleep:** Maintaining a consistent sleep pattern is essential in combatting CFS. Consider avoiding caffeine, alcohol and nicotine and minimize daytime napping.

- **Staying Balanced:** Keeping your activity levels consistent from day to day will prevent depletion and prolonged recovery from doing too much.

Certain complementary alternative medicine modalities may be helpful in treating the pain associated with chronic fatigue syndrome, notes the Mayo Clinic. Acupuncture, massage, and yoga or tai chi may all be helpful for this purpose. A 2008 study published in the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine* states that acupuncture and moxibustion treatments may be effective in treating CFS.⁵

Herbs (e.g., ginseng, echinacea) and homeopathy are other alternative approaches that may be useful for CFS.

How Chiropractic Care Can Help

Chiropractic care may also be helpful in treating CFS. Spinal manipulation and other manual therapies performed by a chiropractor may improve energy levels and decrease pain in people with CFS. According to an article on the Dynamic Chiropractic website, chiropractic management of CFS may include (along with manual therapies to address pain) food allergy assessment, detoxification procedures and dietary modifications.⁶ Ask your chiropractor for additional information about how chiropractic care can help treat CFS.



Quote to Inspire

“Our fatigue is often caused not by work but by worry, frustration and resentment”

Dale Carnegie

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