

Mental health in primary care

Chronic tiredness

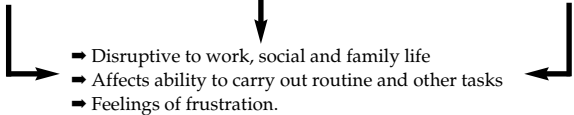
Common symptoms

Compared with previous level of energy, and compared to people known to you:

Tired all the time

Tire easily

Tired despite rest



Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is a much rarer condition, diagnosed when substantial physical and mental fatigue lasts longer than six months and there are no significant findings on physical or laboratory investigation.

Common triggers

Psychological triggers:

- ➔ Depression
- ➔ Stress
- ➔ Worry
- ➔ Anxiety.
- ➔ Doing too much activity
- ➔ Doing too little activity.

Physical triggers:

- ➔ Anaemia
- ➔ Bronchitis
- ➔ Asthma
- ➔ Diabetes
- ➔ Arthritis.
- ➔ Thyroid disorder
- ➔ Influenza
- ➔ Alcohol/drug use
- ➔ Bacterial, viral and other infections.

Medication:

- ➔ Steroids
- ➔ Antihistamines.

What treatments can help?

Both therapies are most often needed:

Supportive therapy for:

- ➔ depression
- ➔ worry/anxiety
- ➔ stress/life problems
- ➔ lifestyle change
- ➔ level of physical activity.

Medication:

- ➔ for other mental or physical disorders
- ➔ anti-depressants are sometimes useful
- ➔ there are no effective medications specific to fatigue and the main treatment follows psychological lines.

Behavioural strategies

- ➔ Examine how well you are sleeping.
- ➔ Have a brief rest period of about 2 weeks, in which there are no extensive activities.
- ➔ After the period of brief rest, gradually return to your usual activities.
- ➔ Plan pleasant/enjoyable activities into your week.
- ➔ Gradually build up a regular exercise routine.
- ➔ Do not push yourself too hard; remember to build up all activities gradually and steadily.
- ➔ Try to have regular meals during the day.
- ➔ Try to keep to a healthy diet.
- ➔ Use relaxation techniques, for example, slow breathing.

Slow breathing for relaxation

- ➔ Breath in for three seconds
- ➔ Breath out for three seconds
- ➔ Pause for three seconds before breathing in again
- ➔ Practise for 10 minutes at night (five minutes is better than nothing).

Increase level of physical activity

A little activity
one or two times a week
(eg walking)



Inactive

Daily activities —
not much effort
(eg fast walking,
shopping, cleaning)



Some activity

Activity that makes
you out of breath for
20 minutes or more,
three to five times a week
(eg jogging)



Active