

THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

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Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Achiness and headache are common symptoms

You experience constant fatigue, and sleep just doesn't refresh you. Your muscles and joints ache, and you may have a headache, sore throat, decreased appetite or impaired concentration. If this describes you, consult your primary health practitioner. You may be suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Many people experience fatigue in daily life. In most cases of fatigue, a treatable physical or psychological condition is the cause. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a less common cause of fatigue and while there is no known cure, many people who have it do get better.

Although CFS occurs in both sexes and in all age groups, it most often affects Caucasian females between the ages of 20 and 50. The cause and development of CFS remains largely unknown. Some clinicians believe Chronic Fatigue is linked to depression. Research, however, has shown that CFS is in fact quite different. People with CFS lack the common depressive symptoms of low motivation and the inability to feel pleasure, and they suffer from additional physical complaints uncommonly seen with depression.

Massage therapy for CFS

Enhances restful sleep, improves mood

Therapeutic massage cannot cure CFS, but it can help reduce pain, improve your mood and energy, and enhance restful sleep. According to the *Journal of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*, "following 10 days of massage therapy, fatigue-related symptoms (particularly anxiety) were reduced, as were depression, difficulty sleeping and pain. The stress hormone cortisol also decreased and dopamine increased." Dopamine is a chemical messenger of the brain that affects movement, emotional response, and the ability to experience pleasure and pain.

Massage for someone with CFS is usually gentle with the goal of relaxation and reducing stress and pain. Therapists often keep sessions to 1/2 hour to avoid increasing fatigue.

To reinforce the benefits of massage, decrease alcohol consumption, develop a gentle exercise routine, prioritize restorative sleep, and take small steps to improve your overall nutrition.



Research shows that massage reduced the pain, anxiety and sleep difficulties related to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.



It's easy to feel alone if you have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, but you can feel better.

Common Symptoms of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

While the cause of CFS is unknown, people who have it are likely to experience the following:

Muscle pain and weakness

Fever

Sore throat

Swollen lymph nodes

Headaches

Night sweats

Mood swings

Alcohol intolerance

Disabling fatigue that does not improve with rest

Self-care for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

You can feel better

If you suffer from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, you should know you can feel better. Many people with CFS begin to heal gradually with the help of techniques such as:

A balance of rest and activity. It's important to stay active, but remember to find a balance with your body's need to rest.

Exercise. Regular, moderate activities give the best results, such as improved mood and increased immunity. Walking is recommended. If you haven't been exercising, you can start by walking 5 or 10 minutes at a time, progressing gradually to more. If fatigue is aggravated, cut back the duration for several days, then begin adding minutes back into your routine. Tai Chi or gentle yoga are other types of exercise which can be especially helpful.

A nutritious diet. Include more whole, home-cooked foods, and consider decreasing your intake of caffeine and sugar. Doing both of these can help you cope better with stress, and support your body in the recovery process.



Cultivate optimism with enjoyable activity — then balance doing the things you love with rest and relaxation.

Cultivate optimism. Although this may seem the most daunting challenge of all, it is important, and can help you feel more energetic. Read or listen to inspiring words or music. Practice mental exercises such as visualization, affirmation and goal setting. For example: 1) Spend some minutes everyday visualizing yourself enthusiastically doing an activity you enjoy; 2) Repeat frequently to yourself, "Each day I feel better;" 3) Set a realistic and attainable goal such as, "I will exercise every morning for 15 minutes." All of these will work together to grow a positive attitude within yourself.



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—From the *Journal of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*