

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Chronic fatigue syndrome is a flu-like illness that causes severe fatigue lasting longer than six months. Other symptoms include mild fever, sore throat, painful lymph glands, muscle weakness and pain, headaches, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, and sleep problems.

Chronic fatigue syndrome is most often diagnosed in people between 25 and 45 years of age. Women are about twice as likely to be diagnosed than men.

Since there is no conclusive lab test for chronic fatigue syndrome at this point, it can be difficult to accurately diagnose. Some cases are felt to be related to the Epstein-Barr virus infections (the cause of infectious mononucleosis) and blood tests can sometimes help determine this. However, many other illnesses—such as depression, thyroid disorder, and mononucleosis—cause symptoms that are similar to chronic fatigue syndrome. Therefore, a diagnosis is typically made only after symptoms continue for at least six months and other possible causes are ruled out.

It's unclear whether chronic fatigue syndrome can be prevented, but it's worth trying the general prevention tips for weakness and fatigue—eating well, sleeping well, and exercising regularly. Also, it's important to deal with any underlying depression or stress you may be experiencing.

Other ways to prevent and treat fatigue include limiting your intake of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol; limiting drugs that might contribute to fatigue, such as tranquilizers and allergy medications; cutting back on television; and alternating rest with exercise.

You should call your health care professional if you experience severe, persistent fatigue that interferes with your usual activities for a week or more—even after you follow the tips just outlined. If you are diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, your treatment will generally consist of adequate rest, a balanced diet, and mild exercise. There are no medications known to cure the condition. However, if depression is involved—and this occurs in about half of all chronic fatigue syndrome patients—then the depression *can* be treated. In general, though, patience is required with chronic fatigue syndrome, and then the long-term outlook is usually good.

* * * * *

For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at **members.kp.org**. Here you'll find the Health Encyclopedia, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics, including “Fibromyalgia.”
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.