

## Scientific Study

# CFS Treatment Efficacy

**“Until a cause and cure can be found, patients are therefore best off limiting energy expenditures and getting plenty of rest.”**

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is an illness primarily characterized by profound, debilitating fatigue which has been ongoing for at least 6 months and is not relieved by rest. Other symptoms include:

- Cognitive difficulties, impaired memory, and poor concentration.
- Postexertional malaise (exhaustion and increased symptoms) lasting more than 24 hours following physical or mental exercise.
- Unrefreshing sleep.
- Joint pain (without redness or swelling).
- Persistent muscle pain.
- Headaches of a new type or severity.
- Tender cervical or axillary lymph nodes.
- Sore throat.

More than 4 million Americans suffer from CFS and over 2.5% of the population aged 18-59 years meet the diagnostic criteria.

The pathogenesis of CFS is uncertain and is likely multifactorial. Conditions that have been proposed to trigger the development of CFS include viral infection, immune disorders, hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis dysfunction, and toxic exposure.

Bjorkum, Wang, and Waterloo are Norwegian researchers who examined close to one thousand patients diagnosed with CFS. The results were dumbfounding! The most commonly prescribed treatments

didn't work.

One such treatment, graded exercise therapy, is based on the mistaken assumption that fatigue is the result of lack of exercise. Yet, many people diagnosed with chronic fatigue lived active lifestyles or were former athletes who were in top shape when they became fatigued. Graded exercise therapy was not only ineffective, but 80% report that it caused deterioration of their condition.

Based on the mistaken assumption that the fatigue is mental fatigue, another common treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, was shown to be ineffective. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a psychological treatment where the patient learns to identify dysfunctional thoughts and attitudes and then to challenge them. It is often used to treat illnesses for which doctors have not yet discovered the cause. While it was useful by roughly half of CFS patients to improve outlook and overall coping with the limitations of illness, it did not improve the fatigue and symptoms of CFS.

Instead, rest helped 97% and pacing, a method of managing energy output so that output does not exceed available energy, was top rated by 96%. Until a cause and cure can be found, patients are therefore best off limiting energy expenditures and getting plenty of rest.

### Reference

Bjorkum T, Wang CE, Waterloo K. [Patients' experience with treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome.] Tidsskr Nor Laegeforen. 2009 Jun 11;129(12):1214-6.

