

Scientific Study

CFS Has a Real Physical Cause

“Functional symptoms, as occurring in chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and somatization, have a genuine organic cause, that is activation of peripheral and central inflammatory and oxidative and nitrosative stress pathways and gut-derived inflammation,” says Michael Maes, a researcher in Belgium.

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.

The dramatic decline in activity level and stamina is often severe enough to result in substantial occupational, educational, and social limitations that lead to defining CFS as a major functional impairment. At least one quarter of those afflicted are either unemployed or on disability.

“The development of new drugs, aimed at treating those disorders, should target these IO&NS pathways,” says Maes.

These inflammatory and oxidative and nitrosative stress may be the result of several factors, including strenuous exercise, toxic exposures, and leaky gut.

Some confusion has existed in the past as to

whether chronic fatigue syndrome was a real illness due to the psychological symptoms which are not emotional or mental in nature, but rather they are caused by intracellular inflammation. These symptoms include aches and pain, fatigue, irritability, sadness, feeling sick, tight muscles, and irritable bowel syndrome.

It is now clear that CFS is very real and has a physical cause.

In addition, Maers has detected the same type of intracellular inflammation in patients diagnosed with somatization disorder. A person suffering from actual somatization disorder experiences physical symptoms as a result of psychological distress.

Somatization disorder has been controversial and frequently is vehemently denied by diagnosed patients who insist their symptoms are not “all in their head”.

Now, the discovery of intercellular inflammation indicates that many patients may have been misdiagnosed with somatization when they do have a real underlying physical disorder that explains their pain and suffering.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. 2008, November 18. Retrieved January 21, 2009, from FirstGov -- The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal Department of Health and Human Services “Safer Healthier People” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/>

Maes M. Inflammatory and oxidative and nitrosative stress pathways underpinning chronic fatigue, somatization and psychosomatic symptoms. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*. 2009 Jan;22(1):75-83.