



Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit (APSU)
Parent/Carer Information Sheet
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)

This fact sheet was prepared by Dr Sarah Knight, May 2014

BACKGROUND

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), sometimes referred to as myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), is characterised by significant and persistent fatigue for 3 months or more together with any of the following: pain, memory and concentration problems, unrefreshing sleep or other sleep problems, and immune symptoms (e.g. sore throat, swollen lymph nodes). Research suggests CFS occurs in children and adolescents, but that it is far less common when compared with adults.

CFS is a complex illness and we do not fully understand what causes it. It is believed that there is likely to be a number of factors involved. In children and adolescents, CFS often occurs following glandular fever or sometimes a stressful or traumatic event can trigger it. There is no one medical test that can confirm the diagnosis of CFS. In children and adolescents, doctors make a diagnosis by excluding all other illnesses after the person has had symptoms continually for three months. Several medical tests including blood tests, are needed to exclude other conditions or illnesses and in people with CFS routine tests are often normal.

CFS can have a huge impact on children and adolescents and is associated with high rates of school absence, social isolation and distress. Emotional distress and mood changes are commonly reported in children and adolescents with CFS. There is no evidence for a single medication that can fix CFS; however, several medications are often used by doctors to help manage some of the associated symptoms, such as sleep problems and headaches. There is research evidence to suggest that graded increase in activity, teaching self-management skills and cognitive behavioural therapy programs can help patients with CFS to improve.

THIS STUDY

This study will contribute to knowledge about CFS in children and adolescents by providing the first ever estimate of the incidence of CFS in Australian children aged < 18 years presenting to paediatricians and other child health professionals. It will also help to describe the features of this illness, the treatments and interventions currently used in Australia. A better understanding of current approaches at a national level is important to inform guidelines and policies for the diagnosis and management of CFS, and to identify priority areas for improved education and research.

LINKS

For more information on CFS, you can visit:

- Women's and Children's Health Network, Child and Youth Health (<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=289&id=2355>)
- ME/CFS society (www.mecfs.org.au)
- Action for ME – Online ME Centre (<http://www.actionforme.org.uk/children-and-young-people>)
- Better Health Channel: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) (http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Chronic_fatigue_syndrome)