# Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Fibromyalgia Fatigue? An Explanation for Your Exhaustion

by MARIANNE BROWN

## What Causes Extreme Fatigue?

Have you ever wondered what causes extreme fatigue? Fatigue is more than tiredness; it is similar to how you feel when you have the flu. Often, you struggle to get out of bed, and performing the simplest of tasks feels like a marathon.

But what causes extreme fatigue? There are different types, so like many other conditions, it varies between everyone. In this article, we look at different types of fatigue, and how it affects those living with fibromyalgia.

### Different Types of Fatigue

There are two types of fatigue: mental and physical. Both have separate biological functions, although it is possible for them to coexist.

#### Physical Fatigue

Fatigue can be overwhelming, causing you to struggle while doing everyday activities. When I am fatigued, I struggle doing simple tasks like bathing and cooking, and spend most of my time in bed, often unable to make conversation.

My muscles feel weak even while performing the simplest of tasks. For some people, this can force you back into bed. You may be unable to sleep, or sleep most of the day, depending on the individual person and the reason for their fatigue.

Repeated physical fatigue can lead to mental fatigue, which affects your thinking, concentration and ability to multitask.

#### Mental Fatigue

Mental fatigue can make it hard to concentrate and stay focused. When I have had mental fatigue, I procrastinate, and then do too much. This creates a vicious cycle or increases my original fatigue.

#### Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

When fatigue becomes chronic, it is often linked to a health condition or problem. It can stem from a condition called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), sometimes referred as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), or Systemic Exertion Intolerance Disease (SEID).

CFS causes are not fully understood. Many theories and research outline this could be caused by physical and/or mental stress, such as a viral infection, stress, hormonal discrepancies, a weakened immune system, or a combination of any of the above.

Many other conditions can also cause fatigue, so it is imperative that other health conditions are ruled out before getting a diagnosis of CFS.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest that CFS may be the end stage of multiple different conditions, rather than one specific condition. There is also some debate about whether fibromyalgia and CFS are the same condition. Some people have been diagnosed with both.

According to research, for individuals who have been diagnosed with CFS and not, fibromyalgia fatigue tends to be the most significant symptom, with some pain as well. With fibromyalgia the most significant symptom is reversed, and tends to be debilitating pain, followed by fatigue.

### CFS Versus Fibromyalgia

There are some key differences between fatigue and fibromyalgia:

- **Condition development:** Many people with fibromyalgia report symptoms following trauma, either physically or emotionally. Many people with CFS describe symptoms that follow a viral infection, like mononucleosis or influenza.
- **Painful areas:** Fibromyalgia causes areas of tenderness or pain in distinct locations on their bodies. People with CFS do not have these pain sites.
- **Inflammation:** Doctors have found no evidence of inflammation with fibromyalgia. CFS patients often complain of fever, swollen glands and other signs of inflammation.
- **Sleep:** A recent study from Japan found differences in sleep disturbances between people with CFS alone, such as excessive daytime sleeping. With fibromyalgia, lengthy periods of sleep can sometimes feel impossible to achieve.

### How Does Fatigue Impact People With Fibromyalgia?

#### Fatigue Without Fibromyalgia

Locating the reason for fatigue is important. Once you know what is causing it, it becomes easier to treat, and symptoms will begin to subside.

General causes for fatigue are split into three categories:

- Physical conditions, such as the flu, viruses, colds, anemia, etc.
- Mental health issues, such as stress, depression, and seasonal effective disorder.
- Lifestyle choices, such as a lack of exercise, poor sleep, obesity, poor diet, medications, or illicit drugs.

### When Should You Seek Medical Advice?

If you are feeling fatigued rather often and you cannot pinpoint the reason, you must make an appointment to visit your doctor. Fatigue can sometimes be caused by a serious medical condition.

If you notice any unnerving symptoms, please visit your nearest hospital immediately. Some examples are:

- Unexplained bleeding
- Severe headache
- Unusual, or sudden pain in the chest, abdominal, back or pelvis area
- Feeling faint
- Irregular heartbeat

- Shortness of breath

**Fatigue With Fibromyalgia**

I have suffered with both mental and physical fatigue with fibromyalgia. I never suffered with fatigue before developing fibromyalgia, except when I had the flu twice.

I find the less sleep I get, the more pain I am in, and my fatigue increases. From my research I have found that sleep is critical to reducing fatigue.

**Strategies for Reducing Fatigue**

For nearly a year I kept a diary, detailing physical and mental symptoms. I tracked my sleep using a Fitbit and recorded both the length and quality. I logged all of my symptoms before, straight after and an hour after I consumed any food or drink, and undertaking any activities.

The most surprising results that I found was that many of the medications I was prescribed to treat my fibromyalgia symptoms worsened my fatigue. I eventually weaned off them with my doctors support.

There are a few strategies you could try to reduce fatigue. Patience is needed, as I have found it can take months to see a change in fatigue levels, but you can try:

- **Exercise:** Exercising reduces pain by releasing the bodies natural endorphins. It increases strength and improves sleep. My fatigue worsens if I do less exercise, but please do not overdo it. Find what works for you.
- **Pacing:** Learn to spread your activities over longer periods of time with plenty of rest in between.
- **Prioritize sleep:** Our minds and bodies regenerate while sleeping, and without quality sleep, we feel drained of energy, foggy, forgetful and confused.
- **Eat well:** Avoid sugary foods, processed foods (especially ones with MSG) and other additives. There are many foods that affect the nervous system. Keeping track of what you consume will help you establish this.
- **Reducing stress:** Stress is unavoidable, and you must learn ways to manage it, so it does not increase your fatigue. Yoga, meditation, or listening to music can be helpful.
- **Alternative therapies:** These can include massage, acupuncture, or reflexology. There are many relaxing techniques that can help reduce fatigue.
- **Medical support:** If you feel you would benefit from a discussion with your doctor, please do so. Be mindful that if your doctor prescribes sleeping medication it can be addictive and can sometimes increase insomnia.