

Running on empty

Feeling tired all the time no matter what you do? Is it making it difficult to enjoy life? You might want to talk to your health care provider about chronic fatigue syndrome. Experts say it's a tough ailment to live with and a tough one for science to grasp, but there are ways to ease the symptoms.

"It is challenging, for sure," says Aminat Ogun, MD, a family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare. "Feeling that intense fatigue day to day for normal activities that other people can tolerate."

Symptoms and diagnosis

Dr. Ogun says there's no known, specific cause for chronic fatigue syndrome. But it's associated with other health issues: viral infections like Epstein-Barr, coronavirus and retroviruses; Lyme disease; depression and sleep disruption. Dr. Ogun says the disorder impacts women more than men and is most often seen in ages 30 to 50.

There's no test to diagnose chronic fatigue syndrome, so providers will look at five symptoms:

- Persistent fatigue
- Malaise (feeling discomfort or ill) after exerting yourself

"If you've done any mental or physical activity and you have that sudden onset of feeling fatigued and very tired," Dr. Ogun explains.

- Feeling unrefreshed after sleeping
- Memory and concentration problems
- Orthostatic intolerance. This is a disorder where your blood pressure rises when you stand up.

"If you've had six months of these symptoms with moderate to severe intensity at least half of the time," you'd likely be diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, Dr. Ogun says. "It's through history taking. When you see your primary care provider, they ask questions. That's how it's diagnosed."

Treatment

Treatment for chronic fatigue symptoms can include medicine and lifestyle changes.

- A provider may recommend medication to help with the joint and muscle aches, nausea, headaches and depression that can come with chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Seeing a mental health professional
- Diet changes
- Graded exercise therapy. A provider will work with you to increase physical activity over time. This can help with overall energy.
- Improve sleep habits.

"Go away from screen time a couple hours before sleep. Don't exercise right before sleep. That can also affect your sleep pattern," Dr. Ogun lists as two examples.

Dr. Ogun says each treatment plan is different. Medical experts don't know when, on average, chronic fatigue syndrome will go away. You may have to manage symptoms for the rest of your life. Dr. Ogun says you should stay in close contact with your primary care provider about your treatment plan.

Learn more

Read more about managing chronic fatigue syndrome on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).