

SCRIPT – PRINT – CHRONIC FATIGUE IS NOTHING TO SLEEP ON

Months into the pandemic, some COVID-19 survivors are experiencing a variety of health issues – such as severe exhaustion, headaches, muscle pain, and cognitive issues – that have some medical professionals believing that there may be a connection between COVID-19 and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

“We know that viruses have been implicated in chronic fatigue syndrome,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Medicine, OSF HealthCare. “The diagnosis is more than six months of profound chronic fatigue so do we have patients coming near that six month point? They got this early and are just recovered from COVID, but their life still isn’t where it used to be and that is where this conversation is coming from.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), chronic fatigue syndrome, once known as myalgic encephalomyelitis, affects up to 2.5 million people in the United States, although many more remain undiagnosed. Anyone – adults, children, adolescents – can get CFS, but it’s most common between the ages of 40 and 60. Women are more likely than men to be impacted by chronic fatigue syndrome.

“Fatigue is a vague symptom; it could be coming from a lot of different things,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Medicine, OSF HealthCare. “We have to properly investigate how long it’s been occurring, and ruling out secondary causes. Could it be sleep apnea, depression, a thyroid problem, could it be anemic? Those are to name a few. You have to talk to your doctor, get more specific about your symptoms, get the appropriate bloodwork, and basically it’s a process of elimination.”

According to Dr. Zaidi, there is no test to diagnosis chronic fatigue syndrome. Some of the possible causes are infections, changes to your immune system, genetics and stress. Among the symptoms are severe fatigue that comes from work, physical activity, shopping or something as simple as showering. Other symptoms include sleep problems, and muscle pain and aches.

“Basically it is an immune response to what we know,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Medicine, OSF HealthCare. “It’s not testable but you can primarily look at microbiological conditions such as bacterial infections, viral infection, anything that stimulates that stress responder in your body can definitely do that. Prolonged illness, prolonged hospitalization, those are a few things that could potentially be a culprit or the start of what chronic fatigue could turn into.”

As far as treatment goes, Dr. Zaidi said the biggest help to a person suffering from CFS is to offer emotional support. A regimented physical therapy program is also recommended. It’s also important not to overdo it when it comes to activities and to get proper rest when needed. Patience and understanding are especially important for those patients recovering from a COVID diagnosis.

“As long as mentally you are understanding what this disease is and what outcomes can have for you, we can get down to what aspects of your quality of life you’d like the greatest

improvement from, and that's where that discussion between you and your doctor is going to have to happen," said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Medicine, OSF HealthCare.

Learn more about [chronic fatigue syndrome](#)