

CFS/ME Service for South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire

'Fairlawns', 621 Middlewood Road, Sheffield, S6 1TT

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Guidance for Early Diagnosis of CFS/ME and referral to the CFS/ME Adult Team

If you have a patient aged over 16 years with disabling fatigue that is not the result of exertion, not relieved by rest and typically suffers from delayed setbacks after physical and mental activity, they may have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome / Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME).

If the patient is under 16 years old, please initially refer to your local Paediatrician, who can then access our Children and Young People's Team. We suggest patients over 65 are assessed first by an elderly care physician

A positive diagnosis can only be confirmed by recognising the presence of a characteristic set of symptoms, together with the screening for, and exclusion of, alternative diagnoses.

CFS/ME guidelines recommend early diagnosis and intervention in order to increase the likelihood of successful management.

Main characteristics of CFS/ME include:

- Primary complaint of unexplained and debilitating, persistent or relapsing, fatigue (not caused by conditions such as inflammation or chronic disease):-
 - of definite / new onset but of a minimum of 4 months duration.
 - not due to on-going exertion and not substantially relieved by rest
 - severe enough to cause substantial reduction in previous levels of occupational, educational, social or personal activities
- Symptoms are worsened by increased physical or mental exertion often with a delayed impact (i.e. it is felt later the same day or next day), and lasting for more than 24 hours. Recovery from such relapses may take days, weeks or even months

Additional characteristic symptoms include:

- Frequent sore throats
- Memory / concentration / word-finding problems
- Unrefreshing / disturbed sleep
- Tender lymph nodes
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Flu-like symptoms
- Multi-joint pain without swelling or redness
- Headaches of a new type, pattern or severity
- Muscle pain or twitching

(Fukuda diagnostic criteria includes at least 4 of the above symptoms present in addition to the fatigue)

Differential diagnoses

It is important to ensure there is no clinical evidence of other causes of fatigue, including:

- Adrenal insufficiency
- Chronic infection
- Immuno-deficiency
- Primary mental health problem
- Major neurological diseases
- Rheumatic diseases
- Anaemia
- Coeliac disease
- Malignancy
- Obesity (BMI>40)
- Primary Sleep Disorder / sleep apnoea
- Thyroid Disease

- Somatisation
- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Fibromyalgia
- Organ failure (eg emphysema, cirrhosis, cardiac failure)
- Reversible causes of fatigue (eg medication, recent surgery)
- Eating disorders

If in doubt about diagnosis do not hesitate to contact the service for advice.

Referral to the CFS/ME Adult Team

The Adult team is currently only accepting direct referrals from GPs. If you are a GP and wish to refer a patient to the CFS/ME service, we do require a **referral letter**, which includes the following information, as well as the results of the screening tests. As we are a therapy service we have no facilities for carrying out any investigations and rely on detailed referral information to enable us to triage referrals adequately.

If you do not include this information we will not be able to accept the referral:

- Reason for referral to the Service
- Provisional diagnosis of CFS/ME
- Narrative of the illness
- Relevant past medical history including mental health
- Information about interventions already tried
- Current medication
- Minimum requirement of the following tests having been carried out (see below)

Screening tests

All people who are referred to the service must have a set of screening tests done within the previous six months. **If you do not include copies of the results of these tests, including their values and the date taken, we will not be able to accept the referral.**

- Full blood count and film
- ESR
- CRP
- Urea and electrolytes
- Serum Creatinine
- Liver function tests
- IgA tissue transglutanimase Ab / Endomysial Antibody IgA for coeliac disease
- Thyroid function tests
- Urinalysis for protein, blood and sugar
- Serum glucose
- Calcium profile
- Creatine Kinase
- BMI

Exclusion criteria for the CFS/ME Service:

- Fibromyalgia (where pain dominates fatigue in clinical presentation)
- Major psychiatric illness with psychotic or manic features
- Concurrent rehabilitation from another service
- Ongoing medical investigation
- Alcohol or substance misuse
- Eating disorders
- BMI > 40

Please send referrals to:

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