

Explanation

Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS) has gone by many different names over the years, such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Chronic Epstein-Barr virus (CEBV) and myalgic encephalomyelitis (M.E.). Characterized by incapacitating fatigue, neurological problems and other symptoms that resemble similar disorders, the symptoms are severely debilitating and can last for months or years.

CFIDS results from a dysfunction in the immune system and can be viewed as an up-regulated or overactive state. However, there is evidence of some immune suppression in CFIDS; patients have functional deficiencies in natural killer cells, which are an important component of the immune system responsible for fighting viruses.

Causes

Many scientists believe that viruses are associated and may be directly involved in causing CFIDS. Since the rediscovery of CFIDS in the United States in the mid-1980's, several viruses, such as enteroviruses, herpesviruses, and retroviruses, are studied to determine what part they play in the disease.

There are on-going studies of immunologic, neurologic, endocrinologic, and metabolic abnormalities and risk factors which appear to play an important role in the development and course of the illness.

CFIDS is not contagious but some of the agents that trigger the disease can be transmissible.

Diagnosis

After clinical evaluation, unexplained chronic fatigue cases can be classified as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome if the patient exhibits certain symptoms that have persisted or reoccurred during six or more consecutive months of illness and must not have predated the fatigue.

Symptoms

- Persistent or relapsing chronic fatigue
- Substantial reduction in previous levels of personal activities
- Impairment in short-term memory or concentration
- Sore throat and tender lymph nodes
- Muscle pain
- Multi joint pain without joint swelling or redness
- Headaches of a new type
- Pattern of severity
- Unrefreshing sleep
- Post-exertional malaise lasting more than 24 hours.

Other Common Symptoms

Many symptoms of CFIDS tends to be individualistic and fluctuate in severity. They include:

- spatial disorientation and impairment of speech
- visual disturbances
- psychological problems
- chills
- shortness of breath
- dizziness and balance problems
- sensitivity to heat and cold
- irregular heartbeat
- abdominal pain, diarrhea, irritable bowels
- low temperature
- numbness or burning in the face or extremities
- dryness of the mouth or eyes
- hearing disorders
- menstrual problems
- hypersensitivity of the skin
- chest pain
- rashes
- allergies and sensitivities to odors, chemicals and medications
- weight loss without changes in diet
- hair loss
- light-headedness, fainting
- muscle twitching and seizures

Treatment of CFIDS

There is no cure to CFIDS, but some symptoms can be alleviated by prescription drugs and nutritional therapy.