

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## WORK OUT CHRONIC FATIGUE

Chronic fatigue is more than just feeling tired all the time. For those who suffer from this mysterious syndrome, it can be a constant battle simply to get out of bed in the morning. Symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) include unexplained fatigue lasting 30 days or more; flu-like symptoms such as a sore throat, generalized muscle pains, head-aches and swollen lymph nodes; difficult concentrating and sensitivity to bright light. CFS was dubbed the yuppie flu in the '80s and, despite the fact that it has been recognized as a legitimate, often debilitating illness, it is still met with scorn and disbelief.

There is no cure for CFS. For some people, it simply goes away, while others are debilitated by it for many years. Because the cause is largely unexplainable, treatment for CFS focuses primarily on relieving symptoms.

### **LOW BLOOD PRESSURE CAN BRING YOU DOWN**

One of the latest theories proposed to explain CFS is that individuals who suffer from this condition also may have extremely low blood pressure. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that 22 of 23 CFS patients also had a disorder called neurally mediated hypotension (NMH). People with NMH get dizzy from standing up too quickly or from standing for extended periods of time, signaling that not enough blood is reaching the brain. When treated for NMH for six months (either with medication or by increasing salt and fluid intake), nine of the 22 CFS patients said that all or nearly all of their CFS symptoms had

disappeared; another seven said that their symptoms had improved.

### **A NOVEL APPROACH**

But what about those who have normal blood pressure, but still fight persistent fatigue? Here's an interesting proposition: Is it possible to treat chronic fatigue with exercise?



Some researchers think so. A recent review of existing research on CFS explored the possibility of using physical activity programs to treat this puzzling condition. The findings are intriguing, if not conclusive.

Many people with CFS claim that they are too tired to exercise. Measurements of strength, exercise capacity and muscle function, however, suggest that CFS patients are not much weaker than the controls (people without CFS) they are compared to in research studies. This suggests that their capacity to exercise is greater than they may perceive. But telling someone who feels unable to get out of bed to exercise is probably an exercise in futility.

### **EXERCISE FOR ENERGY**

Still, physicians such as Dr. Neil Gordon, author of *Chronic Fatigue: Your Complete Exercise Guide*, view exercise as a form of medication and an integral part of rehabilitation from CFS. Exercise programs for people with CFS are not much different than any other comprehensive exercise program: Cardiovascular, strengthening and range-of-motion training should all be addressed. The primary difference is the pace and degree of progression: CFS patients need time to build their strength and adapt to the increased demands of exercise. And, as with any other physical condition, CFS patients should consult with their physicians before beginning an exercise program.

### **EXERCISE YOUR OPTIONS**

People with CFS feel limited by their condition to enjoy the benefits of an active life. But as anyone who exercises will tell you, expending energy brings about increased energy in return. The same may hold true for individuals who are plagued by the unexplained tiredness of CFS.

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