



## THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

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## **CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME**

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is a flu-like condition that can drain your energy and, sometimes, last for years. People previously healthy and full of energy may experience a variety of signs and symptoms.

### **Primary signs and symptoms**

In addition to persistent fatigue, not caused by other known medical conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome has possible primary signs and symptoms.

### Chronic fatigue syndrome symptoms include:

- Loss of memory or concentration
- Sore throat
- Painful and mildly enlarged lymph nodes in your neck or armpits
- Unexplained muscle soreness
- Pain that moves from one joint to another without swelling or redness
- Headache of a new type, pattern or severity
- Sleep disturbance
- Extreme exhaustion lasting more than 24 hours after physical or mental exercise
- Abdominal Pain
- Allergies or sensitivities to foods, alcohol, odors, chemicals, medications or noise
- Bloating
- Chest pain
- Chronic Cough
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness, balance problems or fainting
- Dry mouth
- Earache
- Irregular heartbeat
- Jaw pain
- Morning stiffness
- Nausea
- Chills and night sweats
- Psychological problems, such as depression, irritability, anxiety disorders and panic attacks
- Shortness of breath
- Tingling sensations
- Visual disturbances, such as blurring, sensitivity to light, eye pain and dry eyes
- Weight loss or gain

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According to the International Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Study Group — a group of scientists, researchers and doctors brought together by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to determine a standard method for defining and diagnosing chronic fatigue syndrome — a person meets the diagnostic criteria of chronic fatigue syndrome when unexplained persistent fatigue occurs for **six months or more** along with at least **four of the eight** primary signs and symptoms.

If you have chronic fatigue syndrome, your symptoms may peak and become stable early on, and then come and go over time. Some people go on to recover completely, while others grow progressively worse.

## Causes

Of all chronic illnesses, chronic fatigue syndrome is one of the most mysterious. Unlike definite infections, it has no clear cause. Several possible causes have been proposed, including:

- Depression
- Iron deficiency anemia
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
- History of allergies
- Virus infection, such as Epstein-Barr virus or human herpesvirus 6
- Dysfunction in the immune system
- Changes in the levels of hormones produced in the hypothalamus, pituitary glands or adrenal glands
- Mild, chronic low blood pressure (hypotension) .

## Risk factors

Women are diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome two to four times as often as men, but sex isn't a proven risk factor for this condition. It may be that women are simply more likely than men are to report their symptoms to their doctor.

The condition is most common in people in their 40s and 50s, but it can affect people of all ages.

Because the cause of the condition is unknown, doctors have yet to determine and confirm definite risk factors for the disease.

## When to seek medical advice

Fatigue can be a symptom of many illnesses, such as infections or psychological disorders. In general, see your doctor if you have persistent or excessive fatigue. Severe fatigue that prevents you from fully participating in activities at home, work or school may be a symptom of an underlying medical problem.

**If you have any questions or would like to speak to a counsellor  
7 days a week from 8am – 8pm, please call the Sleeping Disorders Helpline  
0800 SLEEPY (0800 753 379)  
or visit the website [www.sadag.co.za](http://www.sadag.co.za)**

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