



How to deal with chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia



For years, people afflicted by chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and fibromyalgia (FM) have had trouble convincing their doctors that their debilitating symptoms are not their illusion. The good news is, "In spite of whatever doctors may have said to you in the past, the disease is real and you are not crazy," Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum tells Metro.

Teitelbaum himself suffered from fibromyalgia when he was in medical school and had to drop out for a year to recover. The disease left him homeless and sleeping on park benches. Due to this defining period, Teitelbaum has dedicated his professional life to leading scientific research, finding treatments and helping others with these illnesses.

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"I have been there and I know what people are going through," Teitelbaum says. His new book, "The Fatigue and Fibromyalgia Solution," is easy-reading guidance for everybody with day-to-day fatigue, not just for fibromyalgia.

The trouble with CFS and FM — diseases that have afflicted everyone from Florence Nightingale to JFK — starts with differentiating between the two. According to Teitelbaum,

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they are simply two names for the same process.

"If you go to see an infectious disease doctor, you will have chronic fatigue syndrome," Teitelbaum says with a laugh. "If you go out of their offices next door to see a rheumatologist, you will have fibromyalgia."

According to Teitelbaum, chronic fatigue syndrome encompasses more than 100 syndromes. Some key symptoms that identify the illness are being exhausted but unable to sleep; widespread pain; and brain fog (difficulty using vocabulary and short-term memory problems). If you're experiencing these problems, you might be one of more than 12 million Americans, and more than 100 million people worldwide, with a CFS-related condition.

People with CFS can also have tingling in their body, low libido and bowel disorders. They can have an average 32 and a half pounds of weight gain because of the drop of metabolism. Symptoms can go on and on.

Fibromyalgia

CFS's sister illness, fibromyalgia, is marked by muscle pain — all over the body or in certain areas — which is caused by tightening of the muscles.

"Muscles act like springs and they are naturally in a shortened position," Teitelbaum says. "It takes energy to stretch the muscle. So if you don't have enough energy, your muscles got locked in the shortened position, and then they hurt. When that happens throughout the entire body, that is fibromyalgia."

Teitelbaum says he believes that a hypothalamus dysfunction is the mechanism responsible for CFS and FM symptoms. The hypothalamus is the body's master gland, like the main circuit in your home's breaker box. When it is impaired by exposure to overwhelming physical or emotional stress, the hypothalamus "blows the fuse" by turning off power to protect body and mind from further damage. When the main fuse blows, all of the systems regulated by the hypothalamus function improperly. These system include the sleep center, the autonomic system (regulating body temperature, blood pressure, and the antidiuretic hormone) and the glands (affecting the thyroid, adrenals and sex hormones). By the time people have CFS and/or FM, they are likely to have cascading symptoms.

Teitelbaum blames the environment we live in today, which contains all the elements to trigger these conditions: malnourished food (due to the processing that has stripped out the vitamins and minerals), an average 30 percent less sleep at night (compared to 130 years ago), the increasing speed and stress of life, plus chemicals in the environment that block our hormones.

People are at a higher risk of getting these diseases as they get older. Women are three times as susceptible as men because their immune systems are more able to accept foreign things, like babies, "where men's immune system says, 'It's a foreign thing' and kicks it out," Teitelbaum explains.

Get well soon

So what can we do to restore optimal energy? Take care of ourselves. Teitelbaum uses the SHINE acronym: sleep, hormones, immunity, nutrition and exercise. Simply put, you should get adequate sleep, get tested for hormone deficiencies, get treatment for infections, maintain a healthy diet and exercise. Following these steps can improve patients' health by 75 percent after three months, one study found. See a detailed explanation of SHINE [here](#).

Teitelbaum says exercise is the hardest protocol for patients to follow, because people with CFS/FM don't have enough energy. But patients can start with a walking program, aiming for half an hour a day (or 2,000-4,000 steps if using a pedometer). Then people can increase by 50



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steps a day until they reach a level that they are comfortable with.

Besides the physical components of the treatment, Teitelbaum also advocates a mind-body approach. Stress and taking on too many activities can lead people to blow the aforementioned fuse, he says.

You can take an online questionnaire to see if your symptoms line up with CFS and/or FM [here](#).



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