

Energy Crisis

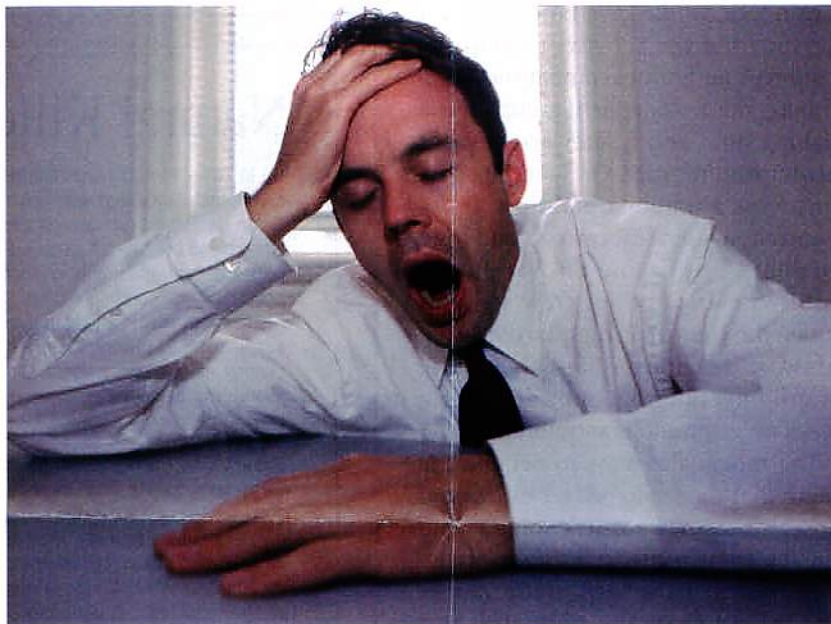
Finding a way to power up and out of chronic fatigue syndrome.

For Floyd Skloot, it began nearly 20 years ago. At first it was like any other plane trip. But the day after he arrived in Washington, DC, from his home in Portland, Oregon, "I felt like I had the flu to the sixth power," says the 60-year-old award-winning author. "Over the weeks, it got to the point where I could no longer work, maintain my balance, think or remember." A few months later, still sick and getting worse, doctors diagnosed Skloot with post-viral encephalitis, blaming the plane's *recirculated air system*. The brain damage also did a number on his immune system, throwing him into a tailspin of symptoms known as *chronic fatigue syndrome* (CFS).

Tired Beyond Belief

The name says it all. People afflicted with CFS feel extremely weak and exhausted but can't sleep because the illness causes unrest. Pain shoots through the muscles, joints and head; "brain fog" disrupts both concentration and memory. At first, it seems like some kind of flu. But after six months of symptoms and ruling out everything else, CFS emerges as the apparent culprit.

Symptoms vary and ping-pong between remission and relapse. Some days it's all you can do to get out of bed; others, you feel fine. In general, you may not look sick, causing an entirely new set of social problems: "There's sometimes a stigma with CFS, that you've got a mental health problem or you can't get your act together," says Martha Kilcoyne, 53, of Sudbury, Massachusetts, former



CFS sufferer and author of *Defeat Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* (Triple Spiral Press).

Since the late 90s, however, studies have identified CFS and its common cohort, *fibromyalgia* (an ailment characterized by muscle, joint and bone pain), as real physiological disorders. They're noncontagious—and treatable. But they can last for years. And they can hit anyone, even the healthiest of people.

The Centers for Disease Control reports that over a million Americans have CFS. If you're a woman, you're four times more likely to get it than a man. And if you're 40 to 59 years old, you're at the highest risk.

Mystery Misery

Although the Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS) Association of America (www.cfids.org) says that no one

knows for sure what causes CFS, and there are no lab tests that can detect it, new studies "point to a genetic predisposition for CFS," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, another former CFS patient and medical director of the Fibromyalgia and Fatigue Centers in Dallas, Texas. He wrote *From Fatigued to Fantastic!* (Avery/Penguin), one of the original books on the subject. "Elevations of one of the body's pain transmitters," Teitelbaum continues, "and depressed hormonal functioning of the hypothalamus [a region of the brain] and the pituitary and adrenal glands may also play roles."

Another CFS trigger is being constantly stressed and rundown. Kilcoyne knows; at the time she fell ill she had one baby on the way and another in her arms, and her hormones were raging. Like Skloot, Kilcoyne got a virus that she couldn't fully shake. Says Teitelbaum: "CFS

represents an energy crisis in the human body. If you're not able to generate enough energy to keep up with the demand—because of infection, stress or deficiencies in nutrition, hormonal function or sleep—you basically blow a fuse. Fatigue and insomnia follow. And without energy, muscles get locked in the shortened position, hurting for hours or years."

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) views CFS as "a combination of deficiencies and obstructions of the body's yin (essence), yang (metabolism), chi (vital energy) and blood," says Lin Zhou, an Oriental Medicine practitioner at Acupuncture & Alternative Medicine in

the herb licorice all promote healthy hormones. Talk to your practitioner about other natural ways to balance your system.

- **Infections.** Boost your immune system and tackle yeast overgrowth by omitting sugar. To promote healthy bacteria and fight infection, take probiotics.

- **Nutrition.** Along with a healthful diet, Teitelbaum recommends a high-quality multivitamin and D-ribose, a naturally occurring sugar, "to dramatically restore energy." He recommends five grams of D-ribose three times a day for three weeks, then twice a day.

- **Exercise.** "Do it as you're able to," says Teitelbaum. "Walking is very good,

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—Jacob Teitelbaum, MD

Dallas, Texas. "Acupuncture moves the stuck chi and repairs disharmonies. Chinese herbs also help, such as *astragalus* for chi, *dang gui* (also called *dong quai*) for blood and *goji berry* for yin."

Teitelbaum says that he has been able to help a "vast majority of patients" using his SHINE protocol, a program that encompasses five paths to healing. (Any CFS program is best used under the direction of a trained healthcare practitioner.) The full protocol runs 42 pages, but some highlights include:

- **Sleep.** Get at least eight hours a night; the herbs *wild lettuce*, *Jamaican dogwood*, *hops*, *valerian* and *passionflower* can help. Other sleep aids include the hormone *melatonin*, the minerals *calcium* and *magnesium*, and the amino acid *L-theanine*.

- **Hormonal support.** According to Teitelbaum, *edamame* (green soybeans, a common Asian snack), *vitamin C* and

but if you're too sick for that, then do warm-water swimnastics," special pool-based exercises.

There is hope: The CDC reports that 40% to 60% of people with CFS reach partial or total recovery. One of them is Kilcoyne, who says, "Once I started taking CFS seriously, it took me about a year to feel really good again."

She felt so good that she climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Skloot, unfortunately, is still disabled. He says he keeps his CFS symptoms at bay with "careful management of daily activities and stress, and resting and walking every day. I've learned how to manage my illness, limiting my activities before relapses limit them for me."

Chronic fatigue is challenging to overcome. But nutrition and lifestyle adjustments have helped many CFS sufferers find their "on" switch again.

—Claire Sykes

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