

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome – Part 2:

Treatment

As outlined in Part 1, there is no single cure for CFS. Some drug therapies have been beneficial in some clients but not all. Of those clients that have shown improvement the effect is not always long lasting.

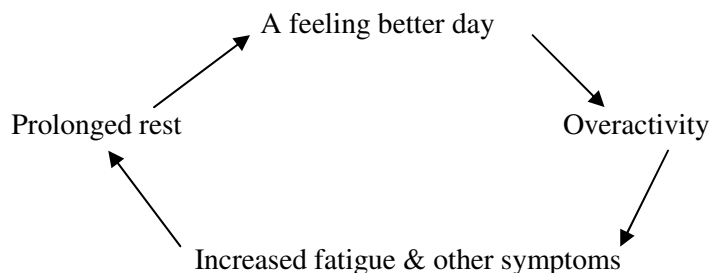
Treatment is aimed at lifestyle management through the use of:

- **Graded Exercise Therapy - GET**
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy - CBT**
- **Pacing and Graded Activity**
- **Deep Relaxation**

The approach used is multi-disciplinary. GET is often carried out by the Physiotherapist (PT), CBT by the Clinical Psychologist, whilst Pacing, Graded Activity & Relaxation are taught by the Occupational Therapist (OT).

What is Pacing?

One component of CFS is that some days you feel better whilst other days you feel worse and there seems to be no obvious reason why this happens. Sometimes people suffering from CFS will find that when they have a good day, they do lots of activities and then afterwards suffer a relapse. This frustrating 'boom and bust' cycle is drawn below:





Think of your energy as a mobile phone battery



Once you have drained a mobile phone battery you have to wait until it has re-charged again to re-use the phone. However, if you only use some of the battery and then top it up regularly then you never completely lose the use of the phone. Managing energy like this through rest and activity will allow a person to do more in the long-term. This is pacing.

So, how does pacing work in practice?

1) Finding the baseline

The first thing to do is to find the activity baseline. This refers to a level of activity that a person feels comfortable with on a regular basis & which does not make symptoms any worse. Then **Identify** all those activities they do on a weekly basis. It then needs to be established which of those activities are **high, medium & low** level in terms of energy expenditure (e.g., having & shower & washing hair – high level activity, pottering around the house – medium level activity, reading a book – low level activity).

When establishing a baseline it is important to remember that all activities must be set at a level that can be maintained on both a good and a bad day. Once the baseline has been found, it can be increased slowly over a period of time so that eventually the person is able to do much more. For this reason, most people find that their baseline is much lower than their current level of activity. By filling in an activity diary an OT can help a person to find their baseline and thus help them on the road to recovery!



What is Graded Activity:

Graded activity is a key concept in the management of fatigue. It examines the components of everyday life and breaks them down into achievable steps. It focuses on the analysis and then grading of daily tasks in relation to fatigue, and viewing this process within the context of the individual and their occupational identity. It is important to identify the specific and unique role that OTs play in relation to rehabilitation within CFS. The therapeutic use of meaningful occupation and purposeful activity is a unique core skill of occupational therapists (COT, 2004). The term ‘occupation’ refers to active participation in self-maintenance, work, leisure and play (AOTA, 1993) and, therefore, describes how a person defines themselves and changes through their interactions with their world. Occupational therapy which is a complex intervention (Creek et al, 2005) seeks to use activity as a therapeutic tool by ‘analysing, selecting, synthesising, adapting, grading and applying activities for specific therapeutic purposes’ (COT, 2004). Grading activities challenges the client’s abilities by progressively changing the process, tools, materials or environment of a given activity to gradually increase or decrease performance demands’ (AOTA, 1993).

The first step, in the process of helping a person to grade his/her own activities, is to assist them with understanding their own individual experience of activity. Grading activity encourages an individual to begin to think in more detail about the energy requirements of everyday tasks.



2) Managing Activities / Grading Activities

This is achieved by encouraging a person to:

- Split activities into manageable chunks with periods of relaxation in between.
- Rate how much energy activities use and then don't do too many high energy activities on one day.
- Be energy efficient by using Energy Conservation Techniques – is there an easier way to do certain things? For example, can you sit rather than stand to do certain activities?
- Think of new ways to do things – for example have a rest in between having a shower and getting dressed.
- Prioritise activities – are there things that do not necessarily need to be done? Dropping some of these may free a person up to do something enjoyable.
- Make a balance between physical and mental activity.

Rest & Relaxation:

3) Rest and Relaxation

- It is very important for the OT to teach a person to build rest and relaxation into their day.
- This rest should come at regular intervals between activities.
- This relaxation should be away from all noise and disturbance and should be somewhere comfortable.



It is important to remember that **REST MEANS DOING NOTHING AT ALL** & It is essential to encourage clients to **STOP WORKING & REST BEFORE EXHAUSTION SETS IN.**

References:

American Occupational Therapy Association (1993). Position Paper: Purposeful Activity.

College of Occupational Therapists (2004) *Definitions and core skills for occupational therapy*. COT/BAOT Briefings 23. London: COT.

Creek J, Ilott I, Cook S, Munday C (2005). Valuing occupational therapy as a complex intervention. British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 68(6): 281-4.

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