

What Is ME/CFS?

Myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) is a **complex, chronic, debilitating disease associated with multiple pathophysiological changes that affect multiple systems.**

EPIDEMIOLOGY

ME/CFS affects between 836,000 and 2.6 million Americans of all ages, ethnicities, races, and socioeconomic groups. While ME/CFS can affect anyone, it affects women more than men. It is most common in people between 40 and 60 years old, but children and adolescents may also be affected.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis relies on a detailed medical and social history, physical exams, laboratory tests, and evaluation of other conditions that may resemble ME/CFS or be present as comorbidities.

ME/CFS diagnosis requires **all three symptoms occur at least half of the time with moderate, substantial, or severe intensity:**



Profound fatigue and impairment that lasts more than six months



Post-exertional malaise (PEM)



Unrefreshing sleep

In addition, **at least one** of the following symptoms must be present:



Impaired memory or ability to concentrate



Orthostatic intolerance

DISEASE COURSE

Disease onset can be either gradual or sudden, and the course can be unpredictable and varies by individual. Some people may appear healthy and “normal” if they are not experiencing symptoms at the time of their clinic visit. However, most patients report that everyday activities such as doctor visits or grocery shopping can worsen their symptoms. ME/CFS can become so severe that some people need total care. About a quarter are bedbound; many are unable to work or go to school.

MANAGEMENT

Currently, there are no medications approved specifically for the treatment of ME/CFS. However, **healthcare providers can treat the symptoms and comorbid conditions.** Techniques to help patients cope with the disease can also improve their quality of life.

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Centers for Disease
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**For more information on ME/CFS,
please visit www.cdc.gov/me-cfs.**