

# Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

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This disease is technically known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis or M.E. Symptoms of it were first recorded in the 1940's but it was not recognized as a disease in its own right until the 1970's and even today there are still some medical professionals who do not recognize it. In all cases there is haematological evidence of chronic infection with Epstein Barr Virus, or occasionally with Cytomegalovirus. Both of these are of the herpes family which is notorious for its ability to remain latent in the body for extended periods, only manifesting and causing problems when the general health falls below par. In fact 99% of people by the age of 20 will have Epstein Barr Virus in their body but only a few of them will go on to develop M.E. Thus M.E. appears to be indicative of an impaired or compromised immune system rather than any single disease process. The symptoms of M.E. tend to be disseminated throughout the body including the central nervous system. Because it is an indication of impaired immune function there are often one or more coexisting diseases which confuse the picture and make diagnosis difficult even for the doctor.

Candida albicans and multiple allergies are frequently seen in cases of M.E. and symptoms of Fibromyalgia are also common.

Below is a list of the most frequently encountered symptoms with approximations of the percentage of sufferers of M.E. who experience them.

- Fatigue (95%), usually made worse by physical exercise. This may be extremely severe and very disruptive to the normal life style of the patient.
- Cognitive function disorders (90%)
  - Attention deficit
  - Calculation difficulties
  - Memory disturbance
  - Spatial disorientation
  - Language confusions
- Psychological disturbance (80%)
  - Depression
  - Anxiety and panic attacks
  - Personality changes especially worsening of previously mild habits
  - Emotional lability or mood swings
- Psychosis (1%)
- Other nervous system disorders (75%)
  - Sleep disturbance including nightmares
  - Headache
  - Changes in visual acuity
  - Seizures or fits
  - Numb or tingling feelings

- Disequilibrium
- Light headedness or feeling 'spaced out'
- Ringing in the ears
- Paralysis
- Severe muscular weakness
- Blackouts
- Intolerance of bright lights
- Intolerance of alcohol
- Alteration of taste, smell or hearing.
- Recurrent flu-like illness (75%) often with chronic sore throat.
- Lymphadenopathy (60%) especially in the neck and axillae. May be painful.
- Allergies (40%) especially catarrhal symptoms, and frequently exacerbation of pre-existing problem.
- Weight change (70%) usually gain.
- Muscle and joint pain (65%)
- Digestive disturbances (50%)
- Diarrhoea
- Nausea
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Gas and abdominal bloating
- Colicky cramping pain.
- Low grade fevers (70%) chronic feeling of excess heat.
- Night sweats (40%)
- Palpitations (40%)
- Severe Pre-menstrual syndrome (70% of women)
- Herpes simplex or Shingles (20%)

Other symptoms seen in less than 10% of sufferers:

- Painful or frequent urination
- Prostate gland dysfunction
- Rashes
- Hair loss
- Impotence

- Chest pain
- Dry eyes and mouth
- Cough
- TMJ syndrome
- Mitral valve prolapse
- Mouth ulcers
- Cold extremities
- Rhythm disturbances of the heart
- Carpel tunnel syndrome
- Piriform muscle spasm causing sciatica
- Thyroiditis
- Various cancers especially of the immune system

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or M.E. is commonly preceded by an acute viral or bacterial throat infection which presumably lowers the immunity sufficiently to allow the EBV or CMV to proliferate. In many ways the symptoms are remarkably like those of Infectious Mononucleosis except that they are worse and last longer. M.E. can seriously disrupt a persons life for as long as 6years and occasionally even longer. It does appear, though, to eventually burn itself out and the person is left with virtually no residual dysfunction. However, with diet and natural remedies it is often possible to speed up the recovery time as well as to help to minimise some of the symptoms.

No practitioner will be able to 'cure' M.E. but effective symptomatic treatment will minimise the adverse effects and improve the overall quality of life.

The first and foremost mode of treatment in this condition is rest. It is imperative that the person be enabled to rest as much as they need. Indeed there is often no choice in the matter, they simply can't get out of bed! Very gentle exercise such as yoga, Tai Chi, swimming or slow walking will also be helpful to encourage lymphatic flow and circulation of blood.

Stress reduction techniques and positive creative visualisations may also be helpful. The patient should be encouraged to take up meditation, yoga, biofeedback, to go for counselling or to join a self-help group.

#### DIETARY TREATMENT OF M.E.

This focuses on enhancing the immune function and optimising overall health. A cleansing and detoxifying diet which rebalances acid and alkalinity in the system will be useful at the outset of treatment as a means of relieving stress from the liver and immune system. This cleansing diet treatment as a means of relieving stress from the liver and immune system. This cleansing diet should consist of a modified fast: 3 or 4 days on a mono-food program eg. apples or carrot & beet juice or green grapes etc. This is followed by 4 days of raw fruits and vegetables before moving onto a fairly strict maintenance diet.

The on-going maintenance diet after the period of detoxification should be strictly animal free, organic and primarily consisting of raw foods to minimise toxins entering the system and to provide cooling forces to the body.

No commercial meat or dairy products should be used because their lacing of antibiotics will significantly impair the immune function.

There should be no refined carbohydrates, caffeine or alcohol consumed. Organically grown fruits and vegetables are recommended to lessen the load on the liver and immune system. The patient should be encouraged to drink plenty of spring water.

If *Candida albicans* is a problem then a dietary program specially designed for *Candida* should be used.

## SUPPLEMENTS IN M.E.

A high quality multi vitamin and mineral supplement should be used daily. Added to this should be the following items:

- B complex 100 mg three times daily
- Zinc 30 - 50 mg daily
- Selenium 200 mcg daily
- Evening Primrose or Blackcurrant seed oil 500 mg. three times daily
- Vitamin C to bowel tolerance
- Garlic capsules 2 caps three times daily.
- Chlorophyll: Wheat Grass, Chlorella, Blue Green algae etc.

Vitamin B complex acts as a tonic for the nervous system and aids in dealing with stress.

Zinc and vitamin C enhance the immune response and assist in fighting viral or bacterial infection.

Selenium also works as a powerful anti-oxidant.

Garlic and chlorophyll both help to remove toxins from the body and the chlorophyll boosts energy because of its very close chemical relationship to haemoglobin.

## HERBAL THERAPEUTICS

### Immuno-modulators

These are herbs which stimulate and regulate the immune response. Some have a general tonic property while others may have a more specific action on only certain aspects of the immune system.

- *Echinacea* spp.
- *Baptisia tinctoria*
- *Allium sativum*
- *Hypericum perforatum*

## Bitter digestive tonics

These will enhance digestion and assimilation of food and aid the body in obtaining all the essential nutrients from digestion. They may be especially useful in cases where there are co-existing food allergies. They also stimulate the liver which enhances filtering and cleaning of the blood and boosts immune function.

- Hydrastis Canadensis
- Berberis vulgaris
- Taraxacum off
- Radix
- Arctium lappa
- Verbena off.

## Adaptogens

These are herbs working mostly on the adrenal glands which aid the body in adjusting to stress, they are especially indicated where there is any long term debility and weakness.

- Glycyrrhiza glabra
- Panax notoginseng (Panax pseudoginseng)
- Astragalus membranaceous
- Eleutherococcus senticosis
- Borago off
- Verbena officinalis

## Stimulants

A pure stimulant such as Centella asiatica or Kola vera should not be used because, while the person will get energy for a while, the overall effect is to drain bodily resources and to worsen the situation.

Mild stimulants working as adrenal or nerve tonics or as nutritive agents may be appropriate even for long term use.

- Avena sativa
- Urtica dioica
- Ginkgo biloba
- Zingiber off
- Myrica cerifera
- Fucus vesiculosus

- Rosmarinus off
- Centella asiatica

Circulatory stimulants such as Rosmarinus off. and Ginkgo biloba are particularly helpful in combating the mental fogginess of M.E. All bitter herbs have some general uplifting and revitalising properties, Gentiana lutea is one of the most useful here.

### Nervines

Herbs to regulate nervous function may be beneficial. They can help with some of the neuropathic symptoms and also with the depression that often accompanies the disease. Many of them have secondary actions which may also be useful in treating M.E

- Scutallaria lateriflora
- Verbena officinalis
- Borago officinalis
- Hypericum perforatum
- Passiflora incarnata
- Lavandula officinalis
- Avena sativa and many more.

The great art of phytotherapy is in the blending of the correct herbs for each individual client.

The herbs must be chosen with care to accurately address the symptoms as well as the underlying cause. In the case of M.E. where the root cause is ambiguous then symptomatic herbal treatment will only be effective where it is accompanied by proper lifestyle adjustments, most particularly in regards to the diet and the level of toxins in the system.

Individualised herbal prescriptions provide room for continuous assessment of the whole patient picture and subtle adjustments can be made as the patient progresses and the symptom picture changes. Bach Flower Remedies enable the practitioner to treat at very subtle, even esoteric, levels and to address issues which cannot be reached by conventional therapies nor by regular phytotherapy. The herbal formulas themselves offer us an infinite array of possibilities. Although the basic ingredients may be similar in many cases, the formula can be precisely tailored to the individual needs and can change over time as the needs change. The dose can also be adjusted as required so that the possible permutations are almost endless.

Treating M.E. in this way offers great hope for amelioration of symptoms and hastening of the healing process.

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it must be said again that each and every patient presents with their own particular set of problems. We may make general assumptions based on epidemiological evidence but we cannot treat successfully unless we acknowledge the uniqueness of each person. Holistic herbal therapy offers the potential to be infinitely adaptable for every set of circumstances. Utilising dietary and supplemental therapy enables us to precisely control the internal milieu and by cleansing and toning the digestive processes we can make the body a less hospitable place for disease to lurk. This has the added advantage of actively involving the patient in their own therapy and forcing them to take responsibility for their own healing.