

Reclaiming Your Life From Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

by Amanda Fey, ND

Kathy was 35 years old, but she felt like she was 65. She was exhausted, *really* exhausted. She had been that way for close to four years now. Coming home from work and counting the minutes until the kids went to bed was becoming a daily occurrence. She was even tired on weekends. She never seemed to catch up on her rest, even when she slept ten hours a night she felt like she needed more sleep. She felt like she was living with her head in a cloud. Her fatigue interfered with everything in her life; work, hobbies, cooking, and most importantly her family. Her husband complained that she had no interest in sex, and her children were begging their mommy to play with them.

Kathy had seen her doctor, and after explaining her condition, was tested for one thing after another all coming up negative, but why was she feeling this way? Her once buoyant life had faded away into a drowsy prison. After months of investigation, she was finally given the diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS).

CFS is one of several names given to a poorly understood, variably debilitating disorder of uncertain cause affecting an estimated 25% of our population. It is defined by debilitating fatigue that is not relieved by rest and not caused by an underlying medical condition. In addition, loss of memory, poor concentration, unexplained muscle soreness, sleep disturbances, headaches, and extreme exhaustion lasting more than 24 hours after physical or mental exercise are some of the other symptoms that accompany the diagnosis of CFS. For unknown reasons, CFS occurs more often in women than men, and the majority of people affected are in their thirties.

Of all chronic illnesses, chronic fatigue syndrome is one of the most mysterious because it has no clear cause. In general, doctors find it difficult to diagnose CFS because it has some of the same signs and symptoms as many other diseases. Currently, there is no diagnostic or laboratory procedure to confirm the presence of CFS. However, multiple triggers may be involved, such as nutrient deficiency, viral infection, stress, immune dysfunction, hormone imbalance, allergies, and toxins. Although pharmaceutical medication may be prescribed to address the various symptoms of CFS, there is currently no known conventional treatment, which is why many people, like Kathy, seek complementary and alternative treatments to help reclaim their lives back.

Professionally, I have witnessed many positive results with patients like Kathy who use natural therapies to treat CFS. Since CFS is a multi-systemic disease, I find that many areas of the body need therapy before improvement is seen. Identification and removal of possible environmental toxins, detoxification, reduction in inflammation, optimization of immune function, treatment of gastrointestinal dysbiosis, and promotion of the innate energy production pathways are just some of the areas involved in the comprehensive naturopathic treatment of CFS.

An area that should never be overlooked when addressing CFS is our digestive system. Our bodies use a tremendous amount of energy in digesting food, so if our digestive

system is not functioning optimally it will use up a lot of energy. More than that, an unhealthy gastrointestinal system can promote inflammation. Identifying food sensitivities and utilizing natural therapies to repair the integrity of the gastrointestinal system is a vital component in the treatment of CFS.

Tonification of the body organs associated with fatigue (such as the thyroid gland, adrenal gland, and the glands that regulate blood sugar such as the liver and pancreas) is another important area to be addressed. Even though lab tests may not indicate abnormalities in these areas, clinically I find that utilizing glandular extracts, botanical medicine, nutritional supplementation, and detoxification protocols to optimize function of these organs are essential for attaining vast improvements in energy for people with CFS.

In Kathy's situation, her previous high intensity lifestyle and years of poor dietary choices contributed to creating this "drowsy prison" in which she lived. Kathy started with a gentle cleanse of her body. She also identified several possible food intolerances. After one month, Kathy was already seeing an improvement in her energy level. It has now been six months since our initial conversation, and Kathy feels like a revived woman. A naturopathic treatment protocol focusing on gastrointestinal health, detoxification and adrenal gland support was the individualized plan which reclaimed Kathy's life. She has hope about her future and wakes daily with a renewed sense of excitement about the day to come.

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