

Complementary MEDICINES

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tapes when in bed

- Have a "wind-down period" before going to bed
- Sleep is often better when a person has 'Paced' and lived within their 'Energy envelope'
- Slow diaphragmatic breathing.

Melatonin a hormone produced by the pineal gland regulates the sleep/wake cycle and promotes deep sleep. Study results in ME/CFS have been mixed. Melatonin production has been found normal in some studies and low in other studies. Melatonin supplementation in ME/CFS was found to have no effects in one study and positive effects in another. Another review concluded melatonin supplementation in fibromyalgia (a common co-morbid condition with ME/CFS) had some effect in treating pain. International ME/CFS specialists and researchers Drs. Lapp, Cheney and Bested all suggest melatonin can be helpful and recommend it be taken about one hour before bedtime. If stomach upsets occur it should be ceased.

Different brands will have different effects on individuals with ME/CFS; some having no effect others having a potent effect. Prescription based melatonin that requires compounding is often reported as inducing the most restorative sleep.

Valerian is a herbal preparation, is shorter acting and can even be taken during the night is sleep



disturbance persists.

Magnesium and calcium have mild sedative and relaxant properties. When magnesium and calcium are low sleep problems can develop. Magnesium (in the form of glycinate or chloride) and calcium (in the form of citrate) can be helpful when taken in the evening.

Lavender extract when used in aromatherapy has been shown to have some benefit, but may not be helpful for those with severe chemical sensitivities

Most people with ME/CFS are highly sensitive to medications, for this reason it is suggested that they commence with 'child sized' doses, check their response and increase only if appropriate. The dose required will vary between individuals. Recommended dosages should never be exceeded due to potential interactions with their prescription drugs. If sleep doesn't improve they should discuss with their doctor the possibility of prescription sedatives or a referral to a sleep specialist.

Vitamin D deficiency

Studies have shown that low vitamin D can cause muscle pain and weakness, furthermore that vitamin D plays an important role in supporting immune function. A regular daily dose of sunlight is important to maintain vitamin D levels, however many people with ME/CFS are sensitive to sunlight. When this occurs vitamin D supplementation can be extremely helpful. Vitamin D levels (25 OH, the active form) should be checked periodically by a blood test as some report that when levels of vitamin D are too high it can add to immune dysfunction.

Getting the best from food

Food intolerance must be tested for and offending food rigorously removed. Common intolerances are fructose, lactose, gluten, wheat and egg, caffeine, drugs and alcohol are not helpful when having ME/CFS due to the artificial stimulant effects. Sugar should also be removed or minimised as much as possible as it

produces toxins that cause pain and headaches; it stimulates the growth of abnormal gut microflora, generates free radicals and raises insulin levels, Low GI foods (less than 55) are encouraged: such as fruits, milk, pasta, grainy bread, porridge and lentils.

Processed foods should be avoided because of artificial additives and the chemical or heavy metal residues that often remain from the manufacturing process. These residues burden the higher chemical or heavy metal loads common to many with ME/CFS. Adding salt to food is not generally recommended, however, those who also have signs of orthostatic intolerance or channelopathy may be advised by their doctor to take extra fluids with added salt and electrolytes.

Like all chronic conditions ME/CFS can be either mild, moderate or severe. Common to all are the following key strategies that are proven to help improve a person's quality of life:

- Stop the 'Push and crash' cycle
- Learn to 'Pace'
- Live within their individual 'Energy envelope'
- Establish a regular daily and weekly routine
- Taking a self help course on ME/CFS
- Seek out an ME/CFS support group with ME/CFS Australia
- A strong support network of family, friends and community services to help with jobs that can no longer be performed
- Being believed
- Observe dietary intolerances.

For further information, see the ME/CFS Australia self help fact sheets at www.mecfs.org.au

