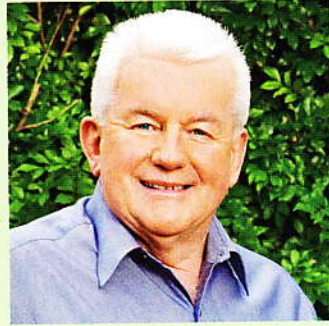




Q&A



New Idea medico Dr John D'Arcy answers all your medical questions

Q Is there a medical test for chronic fatigue syndrome and what's your advice about dealing with it?

KIM DRAPER, EDENSOR PARK, NSW.

A It's so tempting for people when they hear of a friend or colleague who has chronic fatigue syndrome believing it's 'just depression', but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, if the condition is misdiagnosed and called depression, medication actually makes it worse.

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), or myalgic encephalomyelitis, is an illness of no known cause that is characterised by weakness and profound exhaustion, which follows the simplest of normal activities.

Because the cause is unknown there is no test for it but doctors use pathology and imaging to exclude other diseases that have similar symptoms.

CFS can affect children or adults and there may be as many as 100,000 people in Australia with it. The symptoms can vary, allowing some to go to school or continue at work but so severe in others they are confined to bed.

There is no way of knowing which way the condition travels so if the symptoms have been around for six months and not improving, a specialist in the management of CFS is definitely the way to go.

He or she will explore the body's defence system, assess the state of the brain and the nerves of the spine and also measure the hormone levels.

It's very tempting to try alternative treatments but I usually advise avoiding these in the short term, because they are not based on any significant evidence and can make the CFS worse, not better.

I have had close friends with CFS and while they have had a hard time, they are now well and thriving, so there is hope.

For more information on this debilitating illness, visit www.mecfs.org.au.

D	LOW-GI ALTERNATIVE
	A slice of wholegrain low-GI bread with jam, fruit spread or nut spread or a slice of fruit bread.
ate	Dense breads with wholegrains, stone-ground flour, sourdough and commercial breads with the GI symbol. 
cereals	Traditional rolled oats, muesli and commercial low-GI brands - look for the GI symbol.
	Nicola potatoes, carisma potatoes, parsnips, sweet corn, taro, yam and butternut pumpkin.
	Basmati or Doongara Clever Rice, or try Asian noodles. 

ASK DR JOHN FOR ADVICE

Do you have a question for Dr. John? Post it to Dr John D'Arcy, New Idea, GPO Box 7814, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email health@newidea.com.au.