

Supporting Young People with ME/CFS

# Learning challenges for young people with Chronic Fatigue

ME/CFS Information



This leaflet explains some of the common challenges and ways to support improved learning for young people with chronic fatigue. This leaflet is for young people and their parents, carers and teachers.

If you have chronic fatigue you are more likely to find it difficult to stay attentive to what you are doing, whether that is reading a book, watching TV or having a conversation.

You might find it more difficult to concentrate in situations where there are lots of things going on at once (e.g. when you're trying to concentrate but there's lots of noise, distractions and lots of people talking at once).

Also, in situations where you switch between different tasks (like doing some work in front of the TV, or listening to a teacher while getting on with an exercise) you may not be able to concentrate on either task very well.

You may also find it harder to concentrate for a longer period of time, so you may miss things. The longer you spend concentrating the more likely you will become tired, and the more tired you get the more difficult you may find it to learn.



## Understanding

For young people with chronic fatigue **it's more difficult to take in new information**. It may take longer from hearing or reading something to being able to understand what that information means, and it may take more work to remember information you have learnt.

## I'm feeling tired, what should I do?

Sometimes it can be difficult to say how you're feeling when you are tired. Things that might help include:

1. Tell your teachers and parents what to look out for in advance so they can identify it. For example, you may:
  - look flushed or pale
  - have less eye contact with people
  - slouch more
  - use a pre-agreed signal, or show a red card to let people know when you're feeling tired
2. Tell your teachers and parents what you want to happen in situations where you're feeling tired. For example:
  - You may want teachers to not call on you in class
  - Let you go to a designated area to rest
  - You may want your parents to not ask you questions or talk to you

## Top tips for young people with chronic fatigue

### Energy Management

Be aware how much energy you have used, is it an especially busy day, or have you done less than usual? Try to plan out how your week and study times will look in advance, and keep the time where you have to concentrate the same every day. For many, this may include things like time feeling stressed or time travelling as well as time learning. This amount of time can be increased slowly over time with your doctor's support. **Most importantly, don't over-do it.**

### Breaks

Take breaks and only be in lessons when you need to, if you're tired you will not be able to learn as effectively, and it can affect how you feel and learn for the next few days.

### Distractions

Try to find quiet areas to work in, and perhaps avoid unnecessary distractions like TV or music while learning. Talk to your teacher about this, and come up with

some ideas. There may be quieter areas of the classroom, you may be able to wear earplugs, or do some work in quieter areas of school.

### **Safe Spaces**

Think about safe spaces in schools or homes where you can go to rest and recuperate and not be engaged in conversations or activities.

### **Take note**

Taking notes allows you to absorb that information in your own time, and to return to it later. You could also ask your teacher or a friend for notes from the lesson.

### **What works for you?**

Work out what works for you. Everyone feels different about what, for them, is easy or difficult to learn. We have added a recommended recording sheet to help you think about what works best, and what makes things worse for you.

### **One thing at a time**

Focusing on one specific task and giving time for this to be completed before moving on to the next task will help you stay focused and learn.

## **Extra tips for teachers**

### **Handouts & Visual information**

Try to give instructions for work as a hand out as well as saying it out loud. Use power points or whiteboards where possible during classes. Having information visually not only gives the young person more time to remember it, but also gives visual cues to help their memory.

### **Prioritisation**

Prioritise what you need to do. This may mean leaving out sections you would use with other young people so that the young person can use their time and energy most effectively.

### **Environmental Distractions / Sensory Overload**

Where possible keep classrooms or homes quiet when the young person is trying to learn, and consider where the young person sits in the classroom to reduce distractions, as extra distractions may make it more challenging to stay attentive to the task.



### Example Activity Recorder

Monday: I did... Maths and English. Spent time with friends over lunch. Spent half an hour waiting for the bus.  
 I feel... Tired, sick, headache.  
 I would do next time... plan which bus to get in advance and rest inside while waiting. Rest during lunch.

Tuesday: I did... physics and drama. Rested over break time.  
 I feel... Okay  
 I would do next time... The same

Wednesday: I did... English and biology lesson. Homework after class.  
 I feel... Tired  
 I would do next time... Save homework for the weekend.

Be your own researcher – by recording how you feel you can adapt your activity to stay well.

If you have any questions, you can contact us on **01225 821340** Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4pm.

Queries can be emailed to us at [ruh-tr.paedscfsme@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.paedscfsme@nhs.net)

Our administrative team will do their best to help answer your query or will pass on a message to your therapist.

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