

Social Security Ruling on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Case Definition and Diagnostic Symptoms

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is a systemic disorder that may vary in frequency, duration, and severity. CFS can occur in children, particularly adolescents, as well as in adults. The CDC and other medical experts characterize CFS, in part, as a syndrome that causes prolonged fatigue lasting 6 months or more, resulting in a substantial reduction in previous levels of occupational, educational, social, or personal activities.

In accordance with the CDC case definition of CFS, a physician should make a diagnosis of CFS “only after alternative medical and psychiatric causes of chronic fatiguing illness have been excluded.”

Case Definition

Clinically evaluated, persistent or relapsing chronic fatigue that:

1. Is of new or definite onset (that is, has not been lifelong);
2. Cannot be explained by another physical or mental disorder;
3. Is not the result of ongoing exertion;
4. Is not substantially alleviated by rest; and
5. Results in substantial reduction in previous levels of occupational, educational, social, or personal activities.

Diagnostic Symptoms

4 or more specific symptoms that persisted or recurred during 6 or more consecutive months of illness and did not pre-date the fatigue:

- Postexertional malaise lasting more than 24 hours (which may be the most common secondary symptom);
- Self-reported impairment(s) in short-term memory or concentration severe enough to cause substantial reduction in previous levels of occupational, educational, social, or personal activities;
- Sore throat;
- Tender cervical or axillary lymph nodes;
- Muscle pain;
- Multi-joint pain without joint swelling or redness;
- Headaches of a new type, pattern, or severity; and
- Waking unrefreshed

Other Symptoms. (May be present)

- Muscle weakness;
- Disturbed sleep patterns (for example, insomnia, prolonged sleeping, frequent awakenings, or vivid dreams or nightmares);
- Visual difficulties (for example, trouble focusing, impaired depth perception, severe photosensitivity, or eye pain);
- Orthostatic intolerance (for example, lightheadedness, fainting, dizziness, or increased fatigue with prolonged standing);
- Respiratory difficulties (for example, labored breathing or sudden breathlessness);
- Cardiovascular abnormalities (for example, palpitations with or without cardiac arrhythmias);
- Gastrointestinal discomfort (for example, nausea, bloating, or abdominal pain); and
- Urinary or bladder problems (for example, urinary frequency, nocturia, dysuria, or pain in the bladder region).

Co-occurring Conditions. (May be present)

Fibromyalgia (FM), myofascial pain syndrome, temporomandibular joint syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis, Raynaud's phenomenon, migraines, chronic lymphocytic thyroiditis, or Sjogren's syndrome.

Co-occurring conditions may also include new allergies or sensitivities to foods, odors, chemicals, medications, noise, vibrations, or touch, or the loss of thermostatic stability (for example, chills, night sweats, or intolerance of extreme temperatures).

SSR 14-1p: Titles II and XVI: Evaluating Cases Involving Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) Above are excerpts from the Social Security Ruling on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. An overview of the complete ruling can be found here:

<https://howtogeton.wordpress.com/2017/09/20/overview-of-social-security-ruling-for-chronic-fatigue-syndrome/> The full text of the ruling can be found here: https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/rulings/di/01/SSR2014-01-di-01.html