

# Overview - ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) or CFS (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) is a fluctuating condition characterised by extraordinary fatigue, muscle and joint pain, and cognitive problems. Intense tiredness is a delayed result of physical activity. Some people with ME/CFS recover while others go on to develop a chronic condition.

Only those with mild ME/CFS could sustain a university course but would typically limit leisure activities to find the energy for course commitments, need days off and spend weekends in recovery mode. Living with ME/CFS has an emotional and isolating impact.

## **Students with ME/CFS are likely to experience the following:**

- Pain, fatigue and low energy levels leading to:
  - poorer and slower-than-expected performance of academic tasks
  - a need to rest during the day.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Feeling generally unwell.
- Digestive problems and headaches.
- Problems with the nervous system such as poor temperature control, dizziness and loss of balance.
- Increased sensitivity to smells, light, tastes and noise.
- 'Brain fogging' (exacerbated by fatigue, anxiety and stress) leading to:
  - working memory problems and confusion
  - being easily distracted and unable to concentrate
  - finding it difficult to communicate
  - difficulty multi-tasking.



## Top tips for teaching students with ME/CFS:

- As this is a variable condition, be flexible about attendance to allow for incapacitating symptoms.
- Offer one-to-one tutorials in the afternoon rather than the morning to allow for slow starts.
- Be ready to provide tutorials to compensate for missed taught sessions.
- If the student is not participating actively in taught sessions, acknowledge this could be due to brain-fogging or physical discomfort.
- Make adjustments to support the student in physically demanding tasks.
- Allow the student to take breaks from course activities to rest.
- Encourage students to pace themselves with course tasks and have realistic expectations of achievement.
- Avoid last minute changes to taught session venues and times, and allow students plenty of time to move between sessions.
- Support requests for adjusted deadlines where ill-health prevents the student from meeting an assignment deadline.

### Useful links

- <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/what-is-me/introduction>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-cfs>
- <http://www.meassociation.org.uk/2017/09/new-mea-guide-how-to-manage-at-university-with-m-e-25-september-2017>

