

*Scientific Studies:****Exercise Worsens Chronic Fatigue***

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Most people with chronic illnesses, such as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia (FM), and multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS), have been offered well meaning advice, such as joining a club, getting some exercise, and getting out more. These infuriating, but well meaning, suggestions often leave the chronically ill individual feeling misunderstood. After all, would it be appropriate to tell an paraplegic to have fun by going dancing? Of course not!

Well meaning friends often believe that chronic illness is psychological and victims just need to get out and have fun. Or, they may believe that the victim would not be tired if they got in shape. Or worse, they think the illness is affecting the chronically ill person at a psychological level and believe that to be the reason why the ill person does want to go out more often. In reality, those with chronic illness are quite adept at pacing themselves to avoid exhaustion. What friends fail to realize is that exertion is exertion, regardless of work or play. Now science has stepped in to provide evidence of this.

Researchers in Japan noted that patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) report substantial symptom worsening after exercise and took an interest in the specific time course of the worsening. They investigated the influence of exercise

on the subjective symptoms and cognitive function of 9 female CFS patients and compared them with 9 healthy women. An exercise test was conducted and monitoring of vital signs, cognitive function, and psychological status was performed from one week prior to exercise until two weeks after exercise.

Physical symptoms in the CFS patients did get worse on the fifth day. However cognitive and psychological status remained constant. There was no cognitive or psychological benefit to the exercise, yet patients became more fatigued and suffered physical decline.

Regardless of pleasure or pain, exertion is exertion. Pleasurable exertion holds the same fatiguing capability for the chronically ill as unpleasurable exertion. And there are no psychological benefits to boot. The next time we recommend to a CFS patient to get out more, have fun, and exercise, it might be best to think twice and opt for a quite home movie that won't make the person sicker and more discouraged instead.

-LS

Reference

Yoshiuchi K, Cook DB, Ohashi K, Kumano H, Kuboki T, Yamamoto Y, Natelson BH. A real-time assessment of the effect of exercise in chronic fatigue syndrome. *Physiol Behav.* 2007 Jul 24.