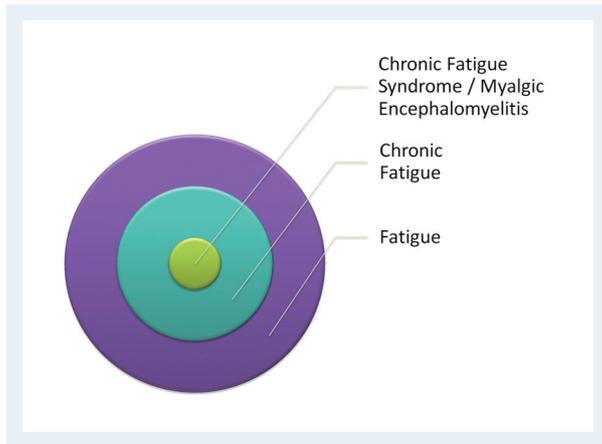


Why do you need a Specialist Fatigue Clinical Service?



Fatigue is a common problem. Around 10-25% of people, who go to see their General Practitioner, are suffering from fatigue. It can have a major impact on people's lives and for some people it can significantly reduce their ability to do everyday activities, leading to loss of employment and dependency on others. Fatigue is a state of complete exhaustion that is normally persistent and does not improve with rest. There is a continuum of severity ranging from mild to very severe. Fatigue is known to be a debilitating symptom of a broad spectrum of illnesses, such as Multiple Sclerosis, Crohn's disease or depression. It can also be a side effect of the treatments given for many health conditions, such as pain killers or

chemotherapy. However, sometimes fatigue can be severe even when there is no obvious reason for this or when problems that have been found, such as hypothyroidism or infection, have been appropriately treated.

A large number of people in the population will experience prolonged and disabling **fatigue** lasting at least one month. Of these, some people will have **chronic fatigue** where it lasts for over six months.

Within the group of people who experience chronic fatigue, some people will have a specific condition, called **Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME)**.

Sometimes problems with fatigue will resolve over time. However, if symptoms are continuing then it is important to have appropriate assessment and treatment. A General Practitioner can perform routine investigations that should show some of the easily identifiable causes for fatigue, such as anaemia, diabetes, infection, liver and thyroid problems. However, for many people investigation results are within normal ranges and it needs to be considered if the patient meets criteria for CFS/ME and whether specialist assessment and intervention is appropriate (NICE, 2007). Not everyone who experiences chronic fatigue will have the syndrome, but rehabilitation strategies can still be beneficial in improving function.

Who can be referred to the Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic?

- People with a provisional diagnosis of CFS/ME or when the GP requires a diagnostic opinion for possible CFS/ME, or
- People who have persistent fatigue of 3 months or more and treatable causes for the fatigue have been excluded or adequately treated with no improvement in symptoms.

The service accepts referrals for adults, aged 17 years and above, who have been initially investigated by the GP, including recommended investigations. The service will accept referrals for therapy for young people, aged 13 – 16 years old, who have been given a diagnosis of CFS/ME by a paediatrician.

What would a specialist assessment at the Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic cover?

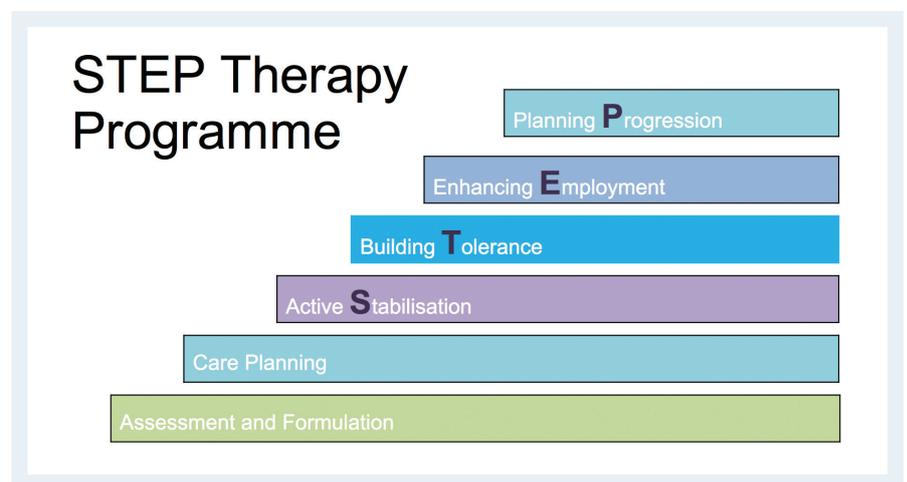
Fatigue is usually a systemic problem, influencing the functioning of biological systems. In addition, CFS/ME is a syndrome and so it causes a range of physical and cognitive symptoms. This can include experiencing pain in muscles and joints, headaches, problems with cognitive processes, such as memory and concentration, sleep, temperature deregulation and many, many more. Therefore, an assessment for fatigue will consider the individual's symptoms, as well as all the aspects that can have a significant impact upon energy levels. This can include a wide range of factors such as sleep, diet, activity patterns, emotional wellbeing, and lifestyle factors. At the Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic patients can have a medical assessment for diagnosis with a Consultant Clinical Immunologist or if the GP has already made an initial diagnosis, a therapy assessment is offered with an experienced occupational therapist.

Following assessment a formulation is then made. This identifies factors that can increase vulnerability to developing fatigue problems (such as childhood illness or trauma), possible trigger factors (such as virus infection or injury) and the nature of the current condition. It identifies an individual's current methods of coping with the symptoms and whether these are supporting their energy needs.

What treatment is available at the Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic?

There are currently no pharmacological interventions available that eradicate fatigue. However, many factors can increase fatigue; therefore there are factors that can help to improve fatigue. The Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic uses treatment approaches recommended by the NICE Guidelines, including a collaborative approach to care, grading activity and cognitive behavioural interventions. The therapy sessions also explore factors that can impair physiological processes that support energy, such as sleep patterns, diet and poor quality rest.

The clinic uses the STEP Programme, which has specific stages for focusing on stabilising behaviours, building tolerance, managing employment and planning progress. Patients and their carers are initially invited to attend an Introductory Workshop to explain the clinical model used and ensure they are committed to undertaking a rehabilitation programme. There is then an individual care planning session to assess which stage is relevant to their needs. Participants attend a short group programme using strategies to improve function and control over symptoms. Individual sessions can be offered as an alternative. Following each stage they are re-assessed as to whether they are ready to progress to the next stage or self-manage further work at their current level. They can then return to the service when appropriate for assessment for the next stage when they are ready to progress further.



Further Information

If you would like to know more about the programmes provided at the Yorkshire Fatigue Clinic then please refer to our website www.yorkshirefatigueclinic.co.uk and you will see options for how to contact us.