

POST-VIRAL/CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME:

Coping with Setbacks



Most people with post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS)/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) will experience setbacks or flare-ups; times when symptoms worsen for a period of time. It can be difficult to maintain your levels of activity during these times. Different things will provoke setbacks, and they may last for varying lengths of time. Each person will have different ways of dealing with a setback. You may be encouraged to become aware of those things that provoke a setback for you and to develop a plan for coping with a setback when it happens. Do not blame yourself. Setbacks do happen: think of it as a problem to be solved.

WHAT PROVOKES A SETBACK?

Setbacks don't always have clear-cut causes but there are a number of things which can contribute to one:

- **Overdoing it.** This may be the result of taking on too much, or simply as a result of doing one activity for too long. Setbacks can be triggered if you fail to pace yourself properly, or if you fail to plan, prepare and prioritise.
- **Stress.** A period of stress in your life may provoke a setback. Be aware of those things that upset you and spot the signs that you are becoming unduly stressed. Stress management may be especially helpful at these times.
- **Periods of illness.** Following a bout of illness, you may become prone to a setback. Remember to restart activities and exercise gradually by pacing yourself.
- **Low mood/seasonal factors.** Many people find that there is an interaction between their frame of mind and their energy levels.

Not all these factors apply to everyone. It is worth recognising as many signs and

characteristics from your own experience of setbacks as this can help you next time. Use the space overleaf to list those warning signs that you have noticed before and add any new ones as you become aware of them.

Warning Signs

Even with the best of planning, it may be impossible to avoid a setback. However, if you do have one, could you use it as a way to learn? Did you ignore the signs? What could you have done differently?

SETBACK MANAGEMENT

An important part of learning to manage your PVFS/CFS is learning to manage setbacks as best you can. This means that you will be able to recover more quickly and feel more confident in the way you handle a setback. Here are some reminders of useful strategies that may help.

Relaxation

Remember the importance of proper, recuperating relaxation. Try to use your favourite relaxation technique.

Planned Rest

What have you found out about the most effective use of rest? It is planned, time-limited and enjoyable.

Activity

It's tempting to stop completely when you are fatigued – don't – remember what you have learnt, and adjust your baseline accordingly.

Prioritise

Put your energy into the most important areas of your life first. Try and keep some energy each day to do activities you enjoy.

Compromise

Are you asking too much of yourself at present? Don't be afraid to step back and reconsider your expectations during a setback. Remember to recognise what you are achieving.

Socialise

If you're very tired it is easy to feel like isolating yourself. Remember that being in touch with someone can be helpful, so what about giving someone a ring, or inviting a friend round?

Pamper

If the going is tough, pace yourself and give yourself a break. If a massage or relaxing shower or bath helps, then go for it. Decide how you will indulge yourself as a kind of compensation next time a setback occurs.

Thinking

Remember the way we think influences how we feel. In the midst of a setback it is easy to slip into bad habits and dwell on the negatives. Try to be aware of this and try out different ways of thinking.

Not all these strategies will apply to you and you may have developed some additional ideas for successfully managing or reducing the length of a setback. It's impossible to say don't worry, don't be concerned or disappointed when you do have a setback. Yes, it is normal for the condition of PVFS/CFS but very frustrating for you when you may have been working hard and improving. Just know it will pass and having learnt from it you should slowly be able to recover back to your previous level of activity.

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