

# M.E. - Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome)



## Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

*“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”*

More information on the Act can be found at

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG\\_4001068](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068)

## ▶ Myalgic Encephalomyelitis as a Disability

M.E, also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, is a chronic fluctuating illness affecting many parts of the body such as the nervous and immune system. What causes M.E. is not fully understood. It often develops following a virus, such as flu.

The main symptoms are:

- Severe fatigue or exhaustion, often after exercise and mental exertion
- Problems with memory or concentration
- Muscle pain and twitching.

Other symptoms may include:

- Generally feeling unwell
- Headaches and migraine
- Sleep difficulties

- Problems with the digestive system (such as loss of appetite and indigestion)
- Problems with the nervous system (such as poor temperature control, sweating and dizziness)
- Heightened sensitivity to sound or light
- Difficulties with balance.

### ▶ **Strategies for dealing with M.E.**

#### **Pacing Activities**

Learn to manage your activity and energy levels, so that over time these will gradually increase. Pacing involves both brain and muscle power, incorporating cognitive activities (such as reading and speaking), physical activities (such as walking) and emotions (overcoming negative thoughts is very important). Pacing should involve focusing on very simple daily activities to begin with, such as writing a letter or phoning a friend. All activities should be timetabled, and it helps to keep a diary of your progress. The key to pacing activities is time – take plenty of rests at every stage. This will help avoid great swings in energy levels. Trying to do too much should be avoided, as this can trigger relapses where your condition deteriorates. M.E. may persist for several years, and symptoms fluctuate; the way you pace your activity and the way you feel emotionally make a big difference to the speed of recovery.

#### **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**

This can help sufferers manage and pace their activity. It can help with physical symptoms such as sleep irregularities and can provide valuable psychological support also, such as helping to overcome a negative attitude and state of mind, which can hinder recovery.

## **Diet**

Sometimes people with M.E. become intolerant of certain foods, such as fibrous foods (e.g. wheat) or dairy products. However, M.E sufferers must try to maintain as balanced a diet as possible, and maintain an adequate intake of fluids. There is little evidence to suggest that a change to a particular type of diet will be beneficial, effects have been very varied. The best person to advise you is your G.P, a specialist or a dietician.

## **Study Strategies**

As a student at Oxford, you are likely to have a demanding workload and busy timetable. It is therefore extremely important that you prioritise your work, and let your tutors and college know about your condition.

Support options:

- Support worker. This is someone who assists you with study related needs, such as note taking, photocopying and note transcription
- Mentor: This is someone who can help you plan, prioritise, and help you manage your workload effectively; balancing your health needs with your academic study needs.
- Contact your library to ask about extended loans
- Speak to your tutors about deadlines for essays. You will also be eligible for extra time in exams.

## **▶ Examinations**

Information about applying for special exam arrangements can be found at: [www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams)

Requests for examination concessions must be applied for via the college office.

## ▶ Financial Assistance

Information about applying for funding can be found at:  
[www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding)

## ▶ Useful Contacts

**The Disability Advisory Service** (details below).

### **Oxford University Student Union (OUSU)**

Thomas Hull House, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, OX1 2HU.

Vice-President – Welfare:

Tel: 01864 (2) 88466. Email: [welfare@ousu.org](mailto:welfare@ousu.org)

Web: [www.ousu.org/welfare](http://www.ousu.org/welfare)

OUSU has an active Disabilities Action Group, which works to raise awareness of disability issues in the University.

**The National M.E. Centre** [www.nmec.org.uk](http://www.nmec.org.uk)

**Action for M.E** [www.afme.org.uk](http://www.afme.org.uk)

Telephone support line: 0845 123 2314 Mon - Fri: 11am - 1pm

**Support M.E.** [www.supportme.co.uk/index2.htm](http://www.supportme.co.uk/index2.htm)

### **Disability Advisory Service**

E-mail: [disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk)

Website: [www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das)

Tel: +44 (0)1865 280 459

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