

# COULD ONE OF THE CAUSES OF CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME BE UNRECOGNISED GRIEVING?

by

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Scientific research over the last two decades in psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrinology has increased the understanding of the mind-body connection. The body has sophisticated chemical feedback loops which respond to internal and external stimuli, restore homeostasis, and are part of the body's immune system. Persistent or intense emotions can distort the feedback creating an adverse affect on health.

When you are healthy the cortical steroids levels in your body are higher during the day, the time when the immune system's defence functions should be most alert and active for cell defences and 'flight and fight' responses. Chemical messages flood the body when it is time to switch the immune system to its night time healing and cell repair mode.

Unrelieved accumulation of stresses, whether physical, mental or emotional disturb the natural rhythms of the body's feedback loops. When this happens levels of cortical steroids remain too high for normal homeostasis to be restored, leaving the system, in effect, on 'red alert', with sleep impaired and reduced capacity to maintain healthy cells and functioning. This reduction in health will have knock-on effects into relationships, performance at work and quality of life. All this adds to the stress and creates further chemical imbalances in the body making it harder to restore the dynamic chemical homeostasis essential for good health.

Losses arising from reduced quality of life will be numerous and varied bringing a range of emotions that also sap energy. A vicious cycle has been created that is not easy to break and can result in chronic fatigue, leaving one feeling too drained to achieve changes that will restore wellness.

Let's look at grief emotions first, then at some suggestions that may help re-programme the body's chemical feedback loops.

Emotions of grief are experienced after any loss when what has been lost is valued. Such emotions are natural, and the energy they take can be harnessed and used to improve wellbeing and adjust to changed circumstances. Adjusting is a journey to understanding and acceptance, rough at times, and involves both inner and outer changes.

Emotions connected with inner changes relate to shock, guilt and a feeling of emptiness and powerlessness. Those relating to changes in the outer world include denial, anger, yearning and risky bargaining to recover or replace what has been lost. All are powerful emotions, which can interact in ways that feel out of control, contributing to the vicious circle of fatigue and loss.

The question then is how to harness the energy of the emotions to break that cycle. It may sound ambiguous, but the answer is to use the logic contained within the confusion

of the emotions, by understanding the meaning and purpose of the jumble of emotions you experience. This can be done when emotions are connected with named losses. This is not therapy, but a life skill which can be learnt and developed.

When analysed grief emotions arise in a logical order;  
 i) recognising loss or potential loss,  
 ii) preventing loss or potential loss,  
 iii) recovering or replacing loss, and finally  
 iv) accepting loss has happened.

However no one experiences loss emotions in clear stages, and when contending with multiple losses it is easy to end up feeling stuck in a maze being pulled in different directions. Learning which emotions are associated with each stage helps in moving through the stages. See Table 1.

Stage in the Grief Process	Emotions associated with that stage
1. Recognising loss or potential loss	Shock and denial
2. Preventing loss or potential loss	Anger and guilt
3. Recovering or replacing the loss	Yearning/bargaining Emptiness/powerlessness
4. Accepting the loss has happened	Intermingling of sadness and returning peace

*Table 1. Stages of the grief process and associated emotions.*  
 (Based on information in *Emotional Logic* Distance Learning Tutorials)

Re-programming the body's chemical feedback loops cannot be done quickly. A coordinated programme involving body and mind can bring changes to break the vicious cycle and create a new blueprint on which to build wellbeing. The programme will have a number of elements. Three keys to success include:

- keeping each element simple;
- developing awareness of what you are experiencing in your mind and body — if this is painful or difficult initially remain as a non-judgemental observer;
- see the programme as a rosebud opening, bringing forth beauty in its own time.

A starting point could be to become aware of what internal conversations are taking place in your mind.

See how you think about yourself and each and every part of your body. Is it critical or encouraging, blaming or forgiving? The attitude in your head about yourself should be positive.

Every time you catch yourself thinking a thought about yourself you would not voice to a friend you love, cancel the thought and replace it with a compliment.

Learning about your own pattern of emotional reactions will help you understand the role emotions have in fatigue and disturbing your body's feedback loops.

A structured method to do this is *Emotional Logic's* Activity Pack<sup>1</sup>. *Emotional Logic* was developed in a healthcare setting and is also used in a wide range of welfare, educational and work places to enable people to have worthwhile discussions and see how emotional factors influence outcomes.

Now turning to the body. Are the cells of your body hydrated? Hydrated cells are happy cells. Dehydrated cells do not function optimally. Drinking more water when you are under-hydrated can seem like watering a dry pot plant, the water runs straight through, which may be inconvenient. But persist, keep drinking water and become hydrated.

Diet is important. Food is an emotive topic, so let's say a few words about digestion and nutrients instead. The saying, 'You are what you eat' is not quite right. What is eaten needs to be digested fully to be beneficial for your health. Regular, warm, small, digestible meals containing nutrient-rich ingredients could become a message to your body that it may be safe enough to stand the troops down from 'red alert'.

*Prana*, the life force, is vital for the body and is obtained through fresh, unprocessed

food as well as the breath. Are you eating empty calories which do not nurture your body? Making changes to what you eat is rarely easy, so make one small change at a time. Such changes, like compound interest, accumulate.

The body was designed to move but exercising consistently and sufficiently to gain the benefits can feel impossible when experiencing chronic fatigue. So the basics are do little bits throughout the day so that by evening all parts of your body have had a good stretch. These small amounts of exercise can be added to on good days to build a suitable routine over time.

The use of a Chi Exercise machine gives some of the benefits of a good walk, is used lying down and, at low speeds, is relaxing.

Resting is not just lying down. First it is important to check what thoughts are going through your head. A repetitive voice declaring how tired you feel does not bring refreshment — use the method mentioned above. Telling yourself how relaxed you are becoming and watching your breathe flow in and flow out could add something good to the adapting feedback loops.

Times of rest can be used to learn more about your emotional habits and to develop a creative armchair hobby.

Enjoy the journey, which will be one of discovery as life is renewed.

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<sup>1</sup>The *Emotional Logic* Activity Pack is available from The Emotional Logic Centre, South Highlands, Blachford Road, Ivybridge, Devon, PL21 0AD. Tel: 08453 709706. email: [office@emotionallogiccentre.org.uk](mailto:office@emotionallogiccentre.org.uk). [www.emotionallogiccentre.org.uk](http://www.emotionallogiccentre.org.uk). Reg. Charity No. 1107527.

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