

## CFS Definition

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) is a medical condition characterised by long-term fatigue and other persistent symptoms that limit a person's capacity to carry out ordinary daily activities. While there is no cure for CFS, evidence has shown that cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and a gradual increase in activity provides the most effective management of symptoms.

## Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

It is helpful to pay attention to our thoughts, as the way we think about situations impacts upon our emotions and behaviour, especially in relation to CFS symptoms and flare-ups. If you catastrophise (i.e., anticipate the worst possible outcome) every time you are faced with fatigue or pain, it can impact upon your mood and fatigue in the long-term. You can break out of this cycle by identifying and challenging unpleasant thoughts, gaining a more balanced view of what is going on – this is the CBT model! CBT is a great tool to help manage stress – as stress and worry are a big energy taker.

## Stress & Relaxation

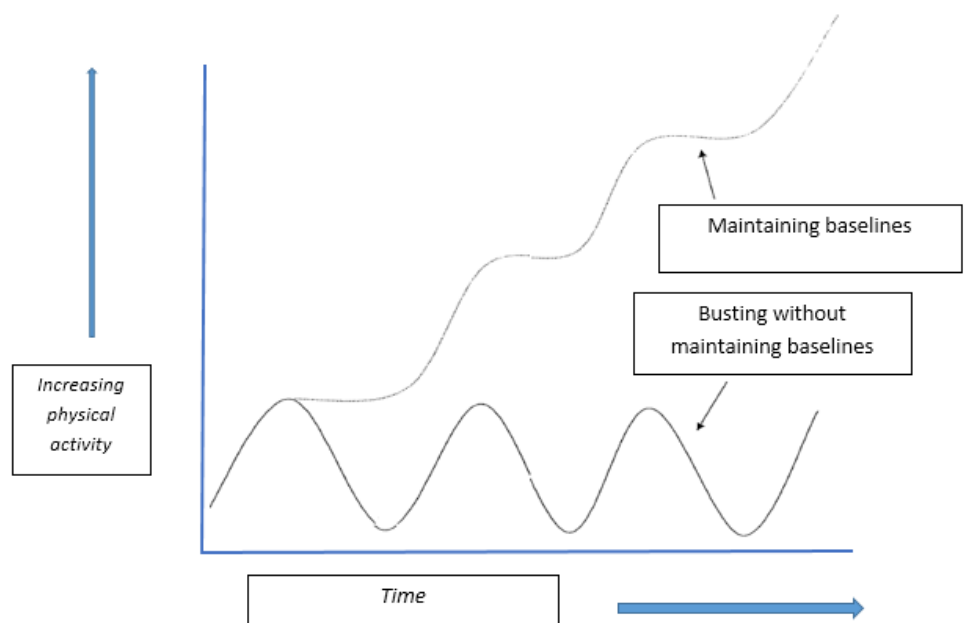
It is important to develop strategies to manage stress, with diaphragmatic breathing being a key component of relaxation. Trial a number of relaxation apps (e.g., Smiling Mind, 1 Giant Mind, Headspace, Mindfulness, Calm), which will guide you through breathing exercises, in addition to progressive muscle relaxation and guided imagery.

## Sleep

Sleep can be impacted by CFS, with poor sleep perpetuating fatigue. It is important to have a consistent bedtime routine and to practice good sleep hygiene (e.g., limit screen time and stop using devices an hour before bed, keep regular hours, avoid napping or limit naps to 30 minutes if required). See <https://raisingchildren.net.au/> for additional sleep hygiene tips.

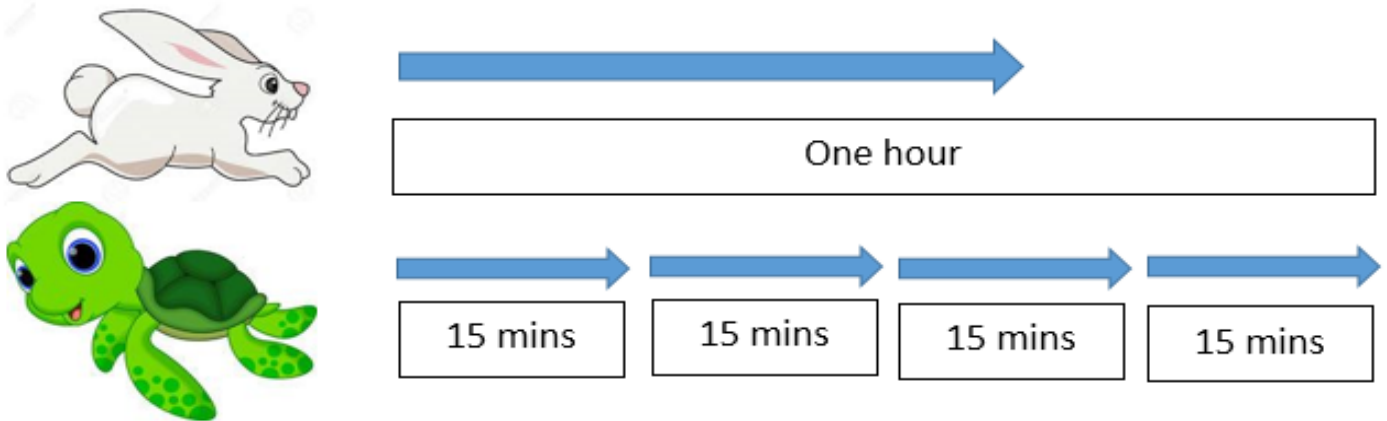
## Baseline Activity

It is helpful to determine your baseline – this is the amount of exercise/activity you can do in a day without making you feel worse. It is important to maintain your baseline even when you are not feeling well or are experiencing a setback (unless you are unwell with an illness unrelated to CFS, such as gastro or the flu).



## Progressing Exercise

Once you have determined your baseline, you can gradually increase the duration or intensity of an activity in very small amounts, allowing you to increase activity levels while avoiding a boom and bust cycle. Gradually progress your exercise by allowing at least two days of no worsening of symptoms before progressing to the next level.



## Energy Spending & Activity Planners

Keeping a diary of your daily activities, noting how they make you feel, will help you become aware of your highs and lows. Similarly, keeping a daily planner will assist you in keeping track of how you are spending your energy each day. You can then structure your routine to ensure you are neither doing too much nor too little. Weekly planners can assist you in ensuring you have the energy required to complete activities that are important to you, while avoiding a potential increase in your CFS symptoms. To help manage the amount of energy required for a task, try breaking down larger tasks into smaller blocks with rest breaks in between. You can also look at modifying some tasks to reduce the amount of energy required (e.g., sit while completing some tasks such as cooking or getting dressed).

## Cognitive Fog

Cognitive fog is a common symptom of CFS, affecting one's ability to focus and maintain concentration. It can also impact upon information processing and one's ability to recall information.



## School & Learning

Given the impact of both cognitive and physical fatigue, school attendance and learning can be significantly impacted by CFS. It is helpful to arrange a meeting with your year level or wellbeing coordinator to discuss what supports are appropriate within the school setting (e.g., nominating a key contact at school, developing a reduced workload or modified timetable, incorporating planned rest breaks during class and during tests and exams, and providing additional time to complete schoolwork, tests and exams).