

Complex chronic diseases

Last updated: **March 2024**

Many Canadians are affected by Complex Chronic Diseases (CCD). CCD's are illnesses that last a long time, require treatment and management and often do not get better on their own. Some CCDs are known as "syndromes". A syndrome is when a distinct group of symptoms cause an illness and loss of function. Fibromyalgia (FM) and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), also called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), are two conditions known as syndromes. Neither of these syndromes has blood or lab tests to confirm diagnosis.

Fibromyalgia

The American College of Rheumatology recognized fibromyalgia (FM) as an actual syndrome in 1990. FM can occur in both men and women, but women are more often affected. There is no known cause for this condition. Early diagnosis can help you avoid further complications and better manage of your symptoms.

The main symptom of FM is pain that is felt in all parts of your body and lasts for at least three months. Over time, the pain becomes more constant, and it can affect more areas of your body. The location of the pain and the severity of the pain may also start to vary. Other symptoms of FM can include:

- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Trouble sleeping
- Memory problems or the inability to think clearly
- Mood disorders such as depression

Symptoms and the severity of symptoms will vary from person to person. If you have FM, you may also have other health conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), migraine headaches and more. For more information, visit:

- [BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre: Fibromyalgia](#)
- [Arthritis Society Canada: Fibromyalgia](#)
- [Canadian Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Fibromyalgia Syndrome in Adults](#)

Myalgic encephalomyelitis

Myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), also called chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), is now recognized as a medical condition. ME or CFS does not have a single cause. It usually occurs after having an infection, typically a viral infection. More research is still being done to learn about the condition. At this point, a diagnosis is based on the symptoms you describe to your health care provider and by ruling out other conditions which could be causing these symptoms. To be diagnosed with ME or CFS, symptoms must be present for at least six months in adults and three months in children.

The main symptom of ME or CFS is fatigue (tiredness) following physical activity (post-exertion) or fatigue to the point that it is disabling. The fatigue can be severe enough to interrupt activities and relationships with others. Other symptoms can include:

- Malaise (feeling generally unwell)
- Flu-like symptoms
- Sleep problems
- Pain
- Memory or other cognitive problems
- Chemical sensitivities or intolerance
- Your body may not function normally

Symptoms and the severity of symptoms will vary from person to person. Some people may recover completely from ME or CFS, while others do not. For more information, visit:

- [BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre: Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome \(ME/CFS\)](#)
- [Health Canada: A Conversation about Myalgic Encephalomyelitis with Dr. Nina Muirhead](#)

Symptom management

Since both FM and ME or CFS have similar symptoms, they also have similar management therapies. The goal of treatment is to relieve symptoms such as pain and fatigue, as well as other conditions such as depression that may develop as a result of these syndromes. For more information and to find services and resources to help you, visit [BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre - Complex Chronic Diseases Program \(CCDP\)](#).

Chronic Lyme disease

Tick bites can cause several diseases in humans. The most well-known is Lyme disease.

Ticks from many areas of British Columbia carry *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the organism that causes Lyme disease. Dozens of Lyme disease cases have been identified in the past 15 years. Many people with Lyme disease have not travelled outside of the province and likely contracted the disease in B.C.

Not all ticks carry the bacteria for Lyme disease and there is only a minimal chance of ticks giving it to you. However, since Lyme disease is such a severe disease, it is worth taking steps to avoid being bitten.

Some people who have had acute Lyme disease may go on to develop chronic symptoms, including fatigue, cognitive symptoms like "brain fog", sleep disturbance and other unexplained symptoms. For more information, visit:

- [BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre - Symptoms Attributed to Chronic Lyme Disease](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control: Lyme Disease \(Borrelia burgdorferi infection\)](#)
- [Health Canada: Lyme disease](#)

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.