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Cystic Fibrosis Research News

Title:

Prevalence of severe fatigue among adults with cystic fibrosis: a single center study

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What was your research question?

We studied the rate of severe fatigue in adults with Cystic Fibrosis (CF). Furthermore, we investigated the relationship of this severe fatigue with [1] physical measures such as lung function and exercise capacity, and [2] emotional and social functioning.

Why is this important?

Technological and medical innovations have improved the life expectancy of people with CF, but they have not taken away the challenge of living with CF. Fatigue is a major part of that challenge. We know that severe fatigue has a large impact on (the quality of) daily life. We are therefore trying to understand how fatigue works in CF, how it develops, and which factors are associated with its development. If we can understand this, we can design programs to prevent and treat this debilitating fatigue.

What did you do?

We asked adults with CF in our University Medical Center to fill out validated questionnaires on fatigue, health-related quality of life, and physical activity. The questionnaire for fatigue was able to discriminate between severe fatigue and normal fatigue. Furthermore, we assessed whether fatigue was related to clinical factors (e.g. lung function and exercise capacity) and to other items in the questionnaires, such as emotional or social functioning. The medical data were extracted from the most recent record in the electronic patient file.

What did you find?

77 adults returned the completed questionnaires (43%). The respondents were between 19 and 54 years old, almost half were male (56%), and their average lung function (FEV1) was 63%. A quarter of the respondents (26%) reported severe fatigue. Participants with higher fatigue levels had on average a lower lung function and exercise capacity. Strikingly, the relationship of fatigue with emotional and social functioning was much stronger.

What does this mean and reasons for caution?

Severe fatigue is a relevant problem that befalls many adults with CF, with big impact on quality of life. Symptoms like fatigue in chronic disease are characterized by a complex interplay of biological and psychological factors. The mind and the body cannot be seen as unrelated entities. We found that biological factors partly explain fatigue, but emotional and social factors also significantly contribute to fatigue and should be taken into account.
Our results should be regarded with some caution because this study was performed in a relatively small group of patients. Also, the time between filling out questionnaires and the most recent medical results from the hospital varied.

What's next?

Fatigue in adults with CF deserves attention. We therefore recommend that doctors routinely screen for severe fatigue and initiate a conversation on fatigue and well-being. Incorporating this in clinical practice will improve patient-centred care. Future studies should aim to develop tailored interventions to prevent and treat this all too common symptom.

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