Interventions for the treatment, management and rehabilitation of patients with chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME): Results of a systematic review

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Objective

To identify effective interventions in the treatment, management and rehabilitation of adults and children diagnosed with CFS/ME.

Methods

A systematic review with exhaustive literature searches was carried out to enable a transparent synthesis of the available empirical evidence. Studies with experimental and quasi-experimental designs, such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and studies with control groups, of any severity or duration of intervention were eligible for inclusion in the review. Study participants could be adults or children with a diagnosis based on any existing CFS/ME case definition criteria. All treatment effects were on between-group comparisons and checked by another to reduce errors and bias. The development process of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) were screened. Two reviewers independently assessed titles and abstracts of articles, and full text papers subsequently ordered, for the results of the individual studies are synthesised in table 1.

Results

Seventy studies met inclusion criteria. Studies on behavioural, immunological, pharmacological, complementary, nutritional supplements, and miscellaneous interventions were identified. Graded Exercise Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) appeared to reduce symptoms. For many other interventions, the evidence of effectiveness was inconclusive, results were in need of replication or the treatment was associated with substantial adverse effects. Very little is known about treatment for children and severely affected patients.

Conclusions

Graded Exercise Therapy and CBT have shown promising results in reducing the symptoms of CFS/ME. There is a need for research to define the characteristics of patients who would benefit from specific interventions.

Disclaimer

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