



# Post-exertional malaise

Updated: March 2025

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# What is post-exertional malaise?

The [2021 NICE guideline for ME/CFS](#) for health professionals in England and Wales talks about "debilitating fatigue that is worsened by activity, is not caused by excessive cognitive, physical, emotional or social exertion, and is not significantly relieved by rest."

Simple physical or mental activities, or combinations of activities, can leave people with ME feeling utterly debilitated. They can also experience an increase in other symptoms.

The impact of this may be felt straightaway but it can typically take a day or two to kick in and is not significantly improved by resting.

**This is a key feature of the way ME affects people and is known as post-exertional malaise (PEM).**

The NICE guideline says PEM relates to the "the worsening of symptoms which:

- is often delayed in onset by hours or days
- is disproportionate to the activity
- has a prolonged recovery time that may last hours, days, weeks or longer."

## Managing post-exertional malaise

**In line with the NICE guidelines for ME/CFS, Action for ME is clear that graded exercise therapy should NOT be recommended for anyone with ME.**

Research (Pheby and Saffron, 2009) has found that early management of symptoms such as post-exertional malaise is the most important factor in how the condition progresses (i.e. how severe ME becomes).

So, it's really important to learn as much as you can about how the symptoms affect you, and what you can do to help manage them.



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