

# Blowing a fuse: chronic fatigue and the American worker

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## **BALTIMORE -**

Like with many illnesses that are difficult to understand, people with chronic fatigue syndrome were told they were just crazy.

That was the wrong diagnosis, said Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, founding director of The Annapolis Center for fatigue and fibromyalgia and author of the recently published book, "From Fatigued to Fantastic." The NIH, CDC, and three years ago the FDA, recognized chronic fatigue as a very serious illness, he said.

"You've basically blown a fuse and that fuse is your hypothalamus, which regulates sleep," said Dr. Teitelbaum. Sufferers typically feel tired, achy, mentally fogged and can't sleep. "Chronic fatigue actually kicked me out of med school and left me homeless for a year," he said.

The average person's sleep has dropped from more than nine hours to less than seven, he said. The disease is easy to diagnose due to the paradox that those affected are exhausted but can't sleep.

In the U.S. and other developed countries, incidence of chronic fatigue have increased from 2 to 8 percent over the last 10 to 15 years. In less developed countries, there have been no such changes, according to Teitelbaum. Several factors contribute to fatigue, Teitelbaum said, including a high calorie, low-nutrition diet, the speed of life and chemicals in the environment that block our hormonal system. More than nine in 10 patients can make a full recovery, Teitelbaum said.

"Most patients, I don't have to tell them to scale back. The illness basically has already taken care of that," Teitelbaum said. "A lot of these people have to choose between brushing their teeth and brushing their hair in the morning. They're often type A overachievers. I help them select things they really love to do rather than 'should have don't's' that plague their thinking."

Teitelbaum's treatment recommendations follow the so-called SHIN protocol — focused on sleep, hormones, infection, nutrition.

"The diet that's the best for people is the one that makes them feel the best," he said. "If you check an hour or two after you eat, you'll see how it feels. And avoid caffeine energy drinks."

## **Chronic Fatigue facts:**

Chronic fatigue syndrome affects more than one million people in the United States. Fatigue affects people of every age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic group. The CDC established that it affects women at four times the rate of men. It is most common in people in their 40s and 50s. Recently, however, people have been diagnosed in their teens and 20s.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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