

What is Post-exertional malaise?

Post-exertional malaise (PEM) is a delayed worsening of symptoms that occurs after minimal physical or mental activity. The key feature of PEM is that the malaise (extreme fatigue and flu-like symptoms) and other symptoms experienced are not in proportion to the amount of activity that has been done. PEM is often delayed and may be experienced hours or days after the activity took place but is most likely to occur 1-2 days after the exertion event. This delay can lead clinicians and patients to believe that symptom exacerbations are random and unrelated to a trigger as they do not attribute their worsened condition to something that may have happened days earlier.

PEM Triggers

o Physical activity:

Depending on severity, physical triggers can range from for example, sitting up in bed, brushing hair, brushing teeth, showering, cooking, cleaning, taking a short walk, etc.

o Mental activity:

Things that require concentration and memory, such as reading, mental calculation, writing, using a computer, tablet or smartphone.

o Social activity:

Interacting with people either in person, on the phone or online.

o Emotions:

Any activity that is likely to cause heightened emotion can be a potential trigger, for example, excitement, anger, frustration, fear, grief, guilt.

o Sensory experience:

Sensory sensitivities are regarded as a symptom and can range from intolerances to noise, light, touch, and even to changes in the weather or certain foods and medications.

o Stress:

The emotions that stress can generate as well as the hormonal changes it triggers in the body.

PEM Symptoms

Increased or new symptoms experienced during an episode of PEM may include:

- 'Brain-fog'
- Burning sensation on skin
- Chronic pain (muscular or joint)
- Cognitive dysfunction
- Disturbed sleep pattern (lack of sleep or need to sleep too much often incl. vivid dreams)
- Eye symptoms
- 'Flu-like' feelings
- Headaches and Migraines
- Heaviness in the limbs or whole body
- Heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli (sound, light, smells)
- Increased chronic fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of stamina/ functional capacity
- Muscle fatigue and weakness
- Nausea

- Night sweats or chills
- Orthostatic intolerance/dizziness
- Problems regulating temperature (and cold/hot extremities)
- Heart palpitations
- Speech problems
- Temporary paralysis
- Short-term memory problems
- Sore throat
- Swollen and painful glands
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- Trembling/ instability of muscle and/or limbs
- Word-finding problems

http://www.meaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Pacing-and-Management-Guide-for-ME_CFS-9.pdf