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Original article

## Association between school absence and physical function in paediatric chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalopathy

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To investigate factors associated with school attendance and physical function in paediatric chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalopathy (CFS/ME).

**Design:** Cross-sectional study.

**Setting:** Regional specialist CFS/ME service.

**Patients:** Children and young people aged under 18 years.

**Outcome measures:** Self-reported school attendance and physical function measured using the physical function subscale of the Short Form 36.

**Methods:** Linear and logistic regression analysis of data from self-completed assessment forms on children attending a regional specialist service between 2004 and 2007. Analyses were done in two groups of children: with a completed Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS) and with a completed Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS).

**Results:** Of 211 children with CFS/ME, 62% attended 40% of school or less. In children with completed SCAS, those with better physical function were more likely to attend school (adjusted odds ratio (OR) 1.70; 95% CI 1.36 to 2.13). This was also true for those with completed HADS (adjusted OR 2.05; 95% CI 1.4 to 3.01). Increasing fatigue and pain and low mood were associated with worse physical function. There was no evidence that anxiety, gender, age at assessment, family history of CFS/ME or time from onset of symptoms to assessment in clinic were associated with school attendance or physical function.

**Implications:** Paediatricians should recognise that reduced school attendance is associated with reduced physical function rather than anxiety. Improving school attendance in children with CFS/ME should focus on evidence-based interventions to improve physical function, particularly concentrating on interventions that are likely to reduce pain and fatigue.

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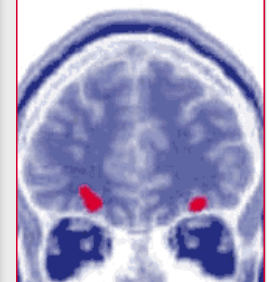
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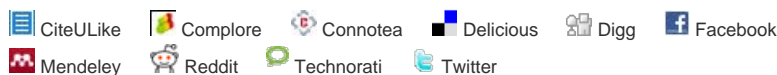


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