

The Symptoms of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

by Louise Sargent

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In the 1950s Britain had several outbreaks of a polio-resembling illness, and in 1955 an outbreak occurred at the Royal Free Hospital, London. An account of this can be found in the British Medical Journal entitled An Outbreak of Encephalomyelitis in the Royal Free Hospital Group, London (published 19 October 1957). After the Royal Free Hospital outbreak, a disorder with similar symptoms was found among the general population and the epidemic form came to be considered the exception. Dr Melvin Ramsay of the hospital's Infectious Diseases department coined the term Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (referring to the effects on the muscles, brain and nerves), recording three main clinical features to the condition:

1. A unique form of muscle fatigue whereby, even after a minor degree of physical effort, three, four or five days, or even longer can elapse before full muscle power is restored. Tenderness in the muscle, along with spasms or twitching, also occurs quite frequently.
2. Circulation impairment involving cold extremities (hands and feet), increased sensitivity to climatic change, and episodes of sweating (which can occasionally necessitate a complete change of clothes or bedding).
3. Cerebral dysfunction involving impairment of memory and powers of concentration. Other typical symptoms include difficulties in completing a line of thought, mixing up words (for example, saying 'hot' when the correct word is 'cold'), sleep disturbances (including a complete reversal of normal sleep patterns) and emotional lability.

In addition, Dr Ramsay noted that all his patients would report on a characteristic variability and fluctuation of symptoms during the course of the day, along with the very strong possibility of the illness becoming chronic and disabling.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) is both complex and individual, which means it is hard to describe the illness without going in to a lengthy description. This is why I believe this original definition by Dr Melvin Ramsay is the best clinical description for the illness. I included information about the other names and clinical descriptions associated with this condition in my article [A Short History of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis](https://www.mesupport.co.uk/symptoms).

More here: <https://www.mesupport.co.uk/symptoms>

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