15. Chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalopathy

Jennifer McIntosh

Sam is in her late 30s and was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalopathy (CFS/ME) 6 months ago. She is currently on long term sick leave from her job as a secondary school teacher after finding it increasingly hard to manage. She is married with two children aged 6 and 8 years and feels guilty she can no longer cook the family’s meals and instead relies on convenience type meals. Her husband works long hours as a lorry driver and is often away from home for long periods. As a family they are having financial concerns since Sam has been on sick leave and she is currently on half pay. This has impacted on food choices. Prior to CFS/ME Sam was extremely active, running three times per week; she now struggles with a 5-minute walk. Over the last year Sam has gained 12 kg in weight and currently weighs 80 kg with a height of 1.7 m. Sam has tried to lose weight but struggles with comfort eating in the evenings, often snacking on chocolate to boost energy levels. Sam has noticed an erratic eating pattern during the day and she often misses lunch because she falls asleep. Over the past 6 months she has also struggled with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms of abdominal bloating and fluctuating constipation and loose stools.

- How would you assess Sam using the ABCDE format? What areas would you concentrate on?
- What is the dietary diagnosis?
- What is the dietetic intervention? Clearly state the aims and objectives of the intervention.
- How might you improve the nutritional content of the ready meals, without increasing Sam’s feelings of guilt?
- What cheap and nutritious alternatives to convenience type meals can you suggest?
- What suggestions can you make to maintain energy levels throughout the day?
- How can you reassure Sam that maintaining energy levels need not result in further weight gain?
- What might be causing the IBS symptoms? What advice can you give to alleviate these symptoms?
- Describe and critically review the BDA guidelines for the management of IBS.
- Would you recommend a vitamin and/or mineral supplement? What evidence have you based this recommendation on?
- Sam is considering seeing a homeopath. How would you advise her about complementary and alternative treatments?