

Understanding Functional Neurological Disorder (FND)

What Does it Actually Mean to Have Functional Neurological Disorder (FND)?

Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) is a condition where there is a problem with how the brain and body communicate, causing neurological symptoms that cannot be explained by other medical or neurological conditions. These symptoms can include motor problems (such as paralysis or tremors), sensory issues (like numbness or vision disturbances), or dissociative symptoms (such as seizures or blackouts). The dysfunction is thought to occur due to a disturbance in the brain's processing of signals rather than from damage to the brain itself. The symptoms are real, but there is no obvious structural or neurological cause that can be detected through conventional imaging or tests.

The exact cause of FND is not fully understood, but it is believed to be influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. Stress, trauma, or significant life changes can sometimes trigger or exacerbate the symptoms.

What Happens from Here on Out?

Once diagnosed with FND, the next steps typically involve:

1. **Assessment and Diagnosis:** The first step is a comprehensive assessment by a neurologist or a multidisciplinary team. This may include a series of tests to rule out other conditions and confirm the diagnosis of FND.
2. **Referral for Treatment:** Depending on your symptoms, treatment might include a combination of physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychological therapies (such as cognitive-behavioural therapy or CBT), and sometimes medication for managing specific symptoms like pain or anxiety.
3. **Ongoing Management:** FND is a long-term condition, and management often focuses on improving quality of life. Regular follow-up appointments with your healthcare team may be needed to monitor progress and adjust treatment plans.

What is the Prognosis for People with FND?

The prognosis for people with FND varies widely. Some people experience a partial or full recovery with treatment, while others may have ongoing symptoms that fluctuate over time. Many people with FND can manage their condition well and lead a normal life, especially with early diagnosis and appropriate treatment. However, for some, the symptoms may persist for years, and ongoing support is often needed to help manage and cope with the condition.

Recovery can be influenced by several factors, including:

- **Early diagnosis and intervention:** The sooner you seek help, the better the chances of symptom improvement.
- **Access to appropriate treatment:** Multidisciplinary treatment involving neurologists, psychologists, and physical therapists is often most effective.
- **Psychological factors:** Addressing any underlying stress, trauma, or mental health issues can also help in managing symptoms.

Risk Factors and crossover conditions

While there isn't any further studies showing any risk factors and/or crossover conditions, it is currently believed that the following conditions can be either a cause of FND and or be a crossover condition causing these to be risk factors of Functional Neurological Disorder; fatigue, chronic pain, hypermobility, chronic pain, Migraine, POTS, Autism.

How Many People in the UK Have FND?

Estimates suggest that FND affects around 1 in 100 people in the UK, making it more common than some well-known neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. FND is one of the most common causes of neurology referral.

However, due to challenges in diagnosis and awareness, many cases may go undiagnosed, or people may be misdiagnosed with other conditions.

Do I Always Need Medication?

Medication is not always necessary for everyone with FND. It depends on the symptoms you are experiencing. In some cases, medication may be prescribed to help manage symptoms such as:

- **Pain relief** (e.g., for chronic pain)
- **Anxiety or depression** (if present)
- **Sleep issues**
- **Seizures or tremors** (if specifically present)

However, medications alone are not typically enough to address the underlying causes of FND. Non-pharmacological treatments, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological interventions, are often key components of the treatment plan.

Emerging Treatment for FND

There are currently emerging treatments for Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) that leverage innovative technologies such as hypnosis, Virtual Reality (VR), and Extended Reality (XR). These groundbreaking approaches are being explored to enhance patient care and treatment outcomes. While these treatments are not yet covered or approved by NICE or the NHS, there is optimism that they will become available in the market within the next 5 to 7 years. The development of these therapies involves collaboration among consultants, university graduates, and patients with lived experience, all contributing to the advancement of this promising field. The integration of hypnosis with immersive VR technology has shown potential in managing various conditions, including pain and anxiety, suggesting a significant role for these methods in the therapeutic landscape for FND

As research continues, the hope is that these innovative treatments will provide effective alternatives for patients suffering from FND.

What Can I Do to Help Myself?

There are several things you can do to help manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life with FND:

1. **Engage in Physical Therapy:** Depending on your symptoms, physical therapy can help improve movement difficulties, strength, and coordination. It is often essential for those with motor-related symptoms like tremors, paralysis, or gait problems.
2. **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT can be effective for addressing the psychological aspects of FND, particularly if stress, anxiety, or trauma is contributing to the condition. It helps you reframe unhelpful thought patterns and cope with physical symptoms more effectively.
3. **Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Learning to manage stress through mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques can be helpful, especially if stress exacerbates your symptoms.
4. **Stay Active:** Gentle exercise or daily activities can help maintain function and improve physical well-being. Always consult with a healthcare provider or physiotherapist before starting any exercise regime.
5. **Educate Yourself:** Understanding your condition can help reduce fear and anxiety associated with FND. The more you know about the condition, the more empowered you will feel in managing your symptoms.
6. **Support Groups:** Connecting with others who have FND can provide emotional support, reduce isolation, and help you learn coping strategies that work for others.

Waiting List for Help & Timescale

In the UK, waiting times for accessing specialist care can be significant, depending on where you live, and the specific services needed.

- **Neurologist consultations:** The wait for a referral to a neurologist can vary, but it is not uncommon for it to take several weeks to months. In some areas, patients may be seen more quickly if there are urgent symptoms like seizures or severe motor impairment.
- **Therapeutic Services:** Access to specialist services like physiotherapy or psychological therapy (including CBT) can also involve long waiting times, with some people waiting up to several months. However, once seen, a treatment plan can be set up, and therapy often involves a combination of regular sessions and self-management techniques.
- **Community Support:** While at the moment there aren't many groups set up for face-to-face meetings, there are some that meet online. This is an ongoing process which will develop over time.

Conclusion

Being diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder can be unsettling, but it is important to remember that this is a real condition that can be managed. While FND does not have a "cure," there are many treatment options that can help you improve your quality of life and reduce symptoms. With early intervention, support from healthcare professionals, and self-care strategies, many individuals with FND can lead fulfilling, active lives.

Stay patient with the process and reach out for the help you need from specialists, mental health professionals, and support networks. The sooner you begin working on managing your symptoms, the better the chances for a positive outcome.

For more information, it might be helpful to have a look at the following websites;

<https://ukfndnetwork.org/resources/> - FND Network - Information

<https://www.neurosymptoms.org/en/> - Neuro Symptoms – Information

<https://www.fndaction.org.uk/> - FND Action – Charity

<https://www.fndhope.org/> - FND Hope – Charity

<https://www.fndnorth.org/> - FND North - Charity