

FUNCTIONAL NEUROLOGIC SYMPTOM DISORDER (FND)

What is Functional Neurological Symptom Disorder (FND)?

FND, also known as Conversion Disorder, is common. In FND, the brain is usually seen as healthy on MRI studies or CT scans. However, research has shown that areas of the brain responsible for “fight or flight”, movement and planning communicate abnormally. This leads to movements and events that can happen out of a person’s control. Symptoms are REAL. They are NOT faked or produced intentionally. FND can cause significant distress and cause difficulty functioning. The good news is that the differences in brain function in FND are reversible with better understanding and treatment.

What are symptoms of FND?

- weakness or paralysis (e.g., difficulty using a body part, difficulty walking)
- abnormal movement (e.g., shaking, stiffness, jerking)
- difficulty swallowing
- changes in speech (e.g., slurred or soft speech)
- attacks or seizures (e.g., “psychogenic non-epileptic seizures” or PNES)
- abnormal sensation (e.g., numbness, loss of feeling)
- “special sensory” changes (e.g., difficulty seeing, smelling, or hearing)
- a combination of the above



Why do these symptoms happen?

For most people, there are many different causes. Some examples are the combination of genetics, personality traits, factors related to upbringing and relationships, sleep, and stress levels. Many, but not all people with FND have experienced physical and/or emotional trauma. For many, symptoms of FND represent a physical reaction to internal problems. Everyone is unique. Working together with your care team, you can learn to see and help change the factors that play a role in FND.

What are common conditions that can come with FND?

- **Mental health:** anxiety, panic attacks, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), “dissociation” (experiences of feeling disconnected from your surroundings or body), “alexithymia” (difficulty describing one’s emotions in words)
- **Physical health:** chronic pain, migraine, history of bodily injury (from physical trauma, surgery)



How is FND treated?

- **Education:** Learning all you can about FND is the first step to recovery. Involving family and friends early in the learning process can also be helpful.
- **Psychotherapy (i.e. therapy, counseling):** Talking with a therapist can help you learn about thoughts, feelings and behavior that relate to symptoms. Re-incorporating activities you avoid due to symptoms may be a goal. Research has shown both individual and/or group therapy to be helpful.
- **Physical/Occupational/Speech Therapy:** PT and OT have been shown to be effective when FND includes weakness or paralysis. Some may benefit from speech therapy. There are providers in these areas who specialize in FND. Your care team may be able to help locate resources.
- **Medication:** Many people have mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety) or medical conditions (e.g., pain) that can make FND worse. Treating those conditions may also help FND. There is no specific medication used to directly treat FND.
- **Relaxation/Mindfulness:** Some people find relaxation or “mindfulness” exercises to be helpful. Examples include deep breathing and “grounding” exercises. These exercises can help you gain mastery over anxiety and fear by calming the nervous system.
- **Hypnosis:** Your provider may show you how to use hypnosis to treat FND symptoms. Hypnosis is a state of deep relaxation that one can use to help prevent or lessen symptoms.