



STAGES OF RECOVERY

STAGE 1 – CRASH

Characteristics

Exhausted all the time – sleeping a lot, very little physical, mental or emotional capacity.

There may be a crash in the nervous system, mitochondrial system, adrenals, gastro-intestinal secretions and possibly detox system at this stage.

Immune system also affected resulting in some patients picking up lots of viruses and infections.

Key priorities:

- Sleep
- Quality rest
- Relaxation CDs can help calming nervous system
- First Aid Kit (see Secrets to Recovery) on difficult days
- When appropriate explanation of illness to help accepting and understanding what is happening
- Gentle physical movement of limbs in bed or whilst seated based on what can do, being very careful not to overdo it
- Establishing a baseline of activity (however low that is) is critically important to avoid booming and busting or pushing the crash any deeper

STAGE 2 – TIRED AND WIRED

Characteristics

Many ME/CFS symptoms often experienced – pain, physical fatigue, poor sleep, head symptoms, digestive symptoms, flu symptoms, etc.

Head can feel very busy while body is exhausted, very hard to relax or feel grounded.

A key characteristic of transitioning from Stage 1 to Stage 2 is where in Stage 1 sleep is usually easy, we can find it harder to sleep in Stage 2. This, along with the general increase in anxiety is because although energy is starting to become, it is going straight to the nervous system to fuel the maladaptive stress response. In some cases patients can confuse the increased anxiety at Stage 2 as meaning things are getting worse, but actually it can be a sign of progress that there is now energy to have anxiety.

Key priorities:

- Calming the maladaptive stress response is critical. Often patients feel a sense of stuckness because they can feel energy coming back, but it is not translating to real energy (more of a nervous energy). STOP process key to this.
- Considered and careful pacing is critical here to avoid booming and busting and to gradually build the baseline. This can be tricky due to not knowing how much energy is real, and how much is just nervous energy.
- This is a good time to start exploring predisposing and perpetuating factors and generally build a deeper understanding of the various characteristics of ME/CFS. Secrets to Recovery a great resource for this.
- Learning to listen to the body critically important, and using EFT or STOPS, or appropriate corrective action, to respond.

STAGE 3 – REINTEGRATION

Characteristics

Have found a baseline, understand the body more, and able to respond appropriately. Energy is definitely increasing and less overall symptoms. Dips in energy and re-emergence of symptoms happens due to pushing the boundary too far – this is inevitable as part of experimenting with limitations

Starting to go back into life – whether that's work, household chores, going out, socializing etc. Have more of a sense of trust that can get well whilst accepting current limitations

A key challenge at this stage can be that what has supported a transition from Stage 2-3 is learning to calm the nervous system. However, learning to do this in isolation from the world is somewhat easier than when surrounded by people, noisy places, and potentially environments that trigger underlying patterns (such as achiever, helper etc), learning to ground these changes into daily life is therefore critical.

A key aspect of Stage 3 is also to make sure that recovery is lasting and sustainable, and also making sure it is 100% recovery where possible, as opposed to 95% and always living in fear or relapse.

Key priorities:

- Pacing is important at this stage, but not necessarily in the more militant ways that can be necessary at Stages 1 and 2.
- Bouncing boundaries – this is a concept covered in various places on Secrets to Recovery, and is basically the principle of gradually challenging pacing levels, but in a considered and careful way.
- Working on deeper patterns behind why became ill in the first place to make sure that recovery is sustainable and avoid relapse

- Getting clearer on what life beyond M.E. will be like and how to bring the lessons of the illness into the wider world
- Emotional work – at this stage clients often have enough energy to be able to manage a deeper exploration of some of the emotional factors that have overloaded their boat
- Find the balance between pushing too much and not doing enough