

# MEDICALLY UNEXPLAINED SYMPTOMS

## Common after a disaster

### What are medically unexplained symptoms ?

Symptoms and the clinical presentation are incompatible with a known physical illness.

Absence of relevant positive physical signs and/or laboratory investigations to support a diagnosis of a physical illness are the other cardinal features.

### What can be the symptoms ?

Any symptom, chest pain, headache, abdominal pain, joint pain, fatigue, palpitations, dizziness, muscular pain, pelvic pain etc can be medically unexplained.

In adults symptoms are usually multiple but in children it can be one or two.

### Unexplained physical symptoms arise in several ways

Due to undetected pathology.

Due to physiological change accompanying emotional arousal (after a disaster such as Tsunami).

Misinterpretation of normal bodily sensations.

Misinterpretation of minor physiological dysfunctions.

As a result of minor physical pathology.

Can be accompanied by a mental disorder, i.e. anxiety, depression, acute stress, post traumatic stress disorder.

### Other clues to detect medically unexplained symptoms

Distress is disproportionate to the symptoms. The patient is not easily reassured in spite of negative investigations or physical signs.

Patient is dysfunctional; may give up or reduce routine activities.

Seeks help frequently from many different categories of care providers.

### Do's and Don'ts in the management

Detect them at the level of presentation and manage at the level of detection.

Retain the patient to avoid conflicting and contradictory approaches by different caregivers.

Perform only essential investigations and avoid unnecessary investigations done to find out 'some' cause.

Do not provide inappropriate reassurance; never say there is 'nothing wrong' or 'it is all imaginary'-indeed there is something wrong but it may not be a physical cause.

Acknowledge the role of psychosocial factors as contributory for symptoms and help coping with the discomfort and disability.

Minimise the use of psychotropic drugs and placebo.

Encourage gradual return to normal activities.

Most acute symptoms will subside with simple measures noted above.

If the intensity of symptoms or repeated visits persists further treatment may be needed.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and / or antidepressants are effective.

For further details contact

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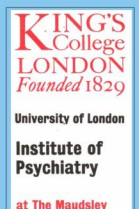
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