Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) has been enfeebling patients and confounding medical professionals for years. Also known as chronic fatigue and immune dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS), CFS was once commonly referred to as the “yuppie flu” after about 200 people, most of whom were white, wealthy, young females, came down with a strange illness in 1984. Although more women reportedly suffer from it than men, chronic fatigue syndrome is now recognized as a disease that crosses all social, economic, ethnic and age barriers.

Unfortunately, much still remains to be understood about chronic fatigue syndrome, as what causes it, what might effectively treat it, and how many people actually suffer from it have all been subjects of debate for the past several years.

As for what specifically characterizes chronic fatigue syndrome, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that, to be diagnosed with CFS, a person must be suffering from: new, unexplained, persistent or relapsing chronic fatigue that is not a result of exertion, not resolved by bed rest, and burdensome enough to markedly diminish daily activity; as well as at least four of the following symptoms for at least six months: new or unexplained headaches; short-term memory or concentration impairment; muscle pain; pain in multiple joints unaccompanied by redness or swelling; unrefreshing sleep; post-exertion malaise lasting more than 24 hours; sore throat, and tender lymph nodes in the armpits or neck. According to the Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome Association of America, however, the symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome are highly variable and fluctuate in severity, in many cases complicating treatment and the sufferer’s ability to cope with the illness.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health claim that, for some people, chronic fatigue syndrome can first appear after a cold, bronchitis, hepatitis or an intestinal bug; for others, it can follow a bout of glandular fever. And while high stress has long been a suspected trigger of CFS, the U.S. CDC and CFIDS Association of America announced in 2001 that stress may exacerbate but most likely does not cause the disorder.

On the polemical subject of CFS prevalence, Dr. Jesse Stoff estimates in his book Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: The Hidden Epidemic that more than 4 million North Americans are CFS sufferers.

Many theorists contend that a strong connection exists between chronic fatigue syndrome and toxin exposure. In an article entitled “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Chemical Overload,” Dr.
R.A. Buist asserts that toxins can impede muscle metabolism, causing the pain and fatigability of muscles felt by many fatigued people.

Addressing the Well Mind Association in Seattle, WA, Dr. David S. Bushcer said, “My personal theory on chronic fatigue is that the increased load of pollutants in our environment, such as pesticides, is causing people to have a breakdown of their immune systems.”

Added Bushcer, “Seventy percent of my patients with chronic fatigue had a chemical trigger; they moved into a new home, there was remodelling at the office, or a pesticide application, and now they have chronic fatigue. I think the mechanism is some kind of cellular poisoning from these chemicals. The affected person’s detoxification system is clogged up or destroyed, they get a backlog of chemicals, and their immune system goes down.”

Dr. Stephen B. Edelson and Deborah Mitchell, authors of What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Autoimmune Disorders, put it like this: “The hallmark of CFIDS is overwhelming, persistent, incapacitating fatigue that leaves those afflicted unable to carry on their normal physical functions. The source of this fatigue is mitochondrial dysfunction – the result of damage from chemicals, heavy metals, and other toxins to the mitochondria, which are the energy sources of cells.”

In his book Tired of Being Tired: Overcoming Chronic Fatigue and Low Energy, Dr. Michael A. Schmidt writes, “Researchers at Uppsala University Medical School in Sweden reported that patients with chronic fatigue contain abnormal levels of mercury within their cells. Another group tested sensitivity to metals such as lead and mercury. Of patients with chronic fatigue, 45 percent showed mercury hypersensitivity and 49 percent showed lead hypersensitivity. When the metal burden was removed from the body (in many cases, by removing mercury-containing silver dental fillings), 77 percent of patients reported improved health.”

If these conclusions are correct, how can sufferers retaliate after the damage of toxic build-up has manifested itself as chronic fatigue syndrome? Authorities like Dr. Michael R. Lyon recommend far infrared sauna therapy.

“For the chronic fatigue patient, a consistent program of infrared sauna therapy will assist the problem of autonomic dysregulation, which is common to the condition,” states Dr. Lyon. “Symptoms of autonomic dysregulation are muscle pain, digestive problems, visual disturbances, and dizziness. These symptoms are reduced, as regular sauna therapy induces normal autonomic functioning.

“Through extensive research, it has been shown that saunas greatly assist in the elimination of accumulated toxins,” Lyon adds. “Toxic metals including mercury, as well as organic toxins such as PCBs and pesticide residues, are excreted in high quantities in the sweat during properly conducted sauna therapy sessions.”

A principal goal of a far infrared sauna bath is to make the bather sweat, and sweating is a natural and necessary function of the human body. As Dr. Sherry A. Rogers declares in her book
Detoxify or Die, “The bottom line is that sweat is the only proven method for getting the most dangerous toxins out of the body.”

In their studies of far infrared saunas, researchers in Japan have concluded that perspiration induced by far infrared sauna use contains as much as three times the amount of toxins contained in sweat expelled during exercise. Chief among the toxins cited in these studies were aluminium, cadmium, lead and mercury.

Given all the evidence and educated opinions on the subject, anyone who suffers from the debilitating symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome has ample cause to further investigate and give serious consideration to the many merits of the far infrared sauna.