



# Questions and Answers About Chronic Multisymptom Illness

## Clinical Practice Guideline Fact Sheet



### What is the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Chronic Multisymptom Illness (CMI)?

Clinical practice guidelines (CPG) are important tools used to improve the quality of health care for specific medical conditions. If you have been diagnosed with CMI, your medical provider and other members of your healthcare team may use the guidance in the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Chronic Multisymptom Illness to develop a personalized treatment plan that's right for you. Recommendations in the CPG are based on an expert panel's review of the current scientific evidence and may help to improve your health outcomes.



### Is CMI the same as Gulf War Illnesses (GWI)?

CMI is a broad definition and GWI falls under that umbrella. An expert panel decided that using a broader definition of CMI would be most appropriate for the CPG. The panel concluded that there were not enough published results to create a CPG specific to GWI. After every modern military combat deployment, some Service Members have reported illnesses characterized by multiple chronic symptoms upon their return. While Service Members that were part of the Gulf War report more of these symptoms, the experience of CMI is not unique to those who served in any specific combat era.



### How do I get a service-connected disability rating for CMI or GWI?

A common challenge for those seeking a service-connected disability rating for CMI or GWI is the uncertainty surrounding the diagnosis of these conditions. If you are applying for VA disability benefits, consider working with an accredited representative or agent to assist you in completing a standard claim, or a Fully Developed Claim for submission through eBenefits. Accredited organizations and individuals have specialized training in VA benefits law and procedure and have VA permission to represent Veterans in their claims for VA benefits. You may also apply by visiting a VA Regional Office where trained staff can assist you. Learn more on the "Applying for Benefits" page at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/Applying.asp>.



### Should I take opioids for my chronic pain?

No. Opioids are not recommended for the management of the chronic pain typically reported by patients with CMI. Ask your doctor about nonopioid medications as well as other pain management options such as acupuncture and mindfulness-based therapy. Working closely with your healthcare team is the best way to find a non-opioid pain management strategy that works for you.



### **Why are so many pharmacological/psychotropic medications recommended?**

Doctors often use medications to treat or manage the symptoms of an illness. Many medications can be used for more than one condition. For example, there are medications used in the treatment of depression and anxiety that can also help to relieve some symptoms of CMI. It does not mean that the CMI symptoms are related to depression or anxiety. The medications simply work well for some symptoms related to CMI as well as for depression and anxiety in others.



### **What do I do if I think I have CMI?**

Talk to your healthcare team about any and all symptoms that you may be experiencing. Your providers will determine whether your symptoms require urgent treatment and treat those accordingly. They may then do a thorough evaluation to understand your symptoms and assess for other conditions. Use of the CPG may assist your provider in diagnosing whether you have CMI or another medical condition that may explain your symptoms. Additional testing such as blood tests and imaging scans may be ordered.



### **Is CMI a mental health condition?**

No. CMI is not a mental health condition. It is the result of changes in our bodies in the same way that any disease is related to changes in the ways our bodies function. CMI should be treated like any other medical condition, using best practice approaches that are evidence-based and delivered using resources such as the VA/DoD CMI Clinical Practice Guideline. It is also important to remember that mental health conditions are common in all populations, and may occur together with CMI. It is important that all health conditions are identified and treated appropriately. That will lead to the best health outcomes for our service members, Veterans, and family members.



### **Are there any medications that I can take to help me sleep at night?**

Maybe. The use of sleep medications is generally not recommended in the management of CMI. If you regularly have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or both, the best treatment option will depend on the underlying cause. Make an appointment to see your medical provider to be evaluated for sleep disorders and other conditions that may be contributing to your sleep problems.



### **Is there anything I can take to boost my energy?**

There are a variety of medical conditions that may be the cause of poor energy levels. If the cause of poor energy levels is known, it is important to treat the underlying condition. If the cause is not known, cognitive or motivational therapies may be effective in boosting energy levels. If a medication needs to be considered, your healthcare team will work with you to determine the best options.