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SYDNEY

**FATIGUE CLINIC**  
A multi-disciplinary intervention clinic for patients with medically-unexplained fatigue

## Program Information

The *UNSW Fatigue Clinic* is a multi-disciplinary health service for people with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), post-infective fatigue syndrome (PIFS), post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS) or post-cancer fatigue (PCF). The program aims to improve functional capacity (both physical and cognitive) of people affected by fatigue disorders by applying graded physical and cognitive activity training in combination with cognitive behavioural techniques. The service is based at the University of New South Wales and is coordinated by a team of medical and health professionals with expertise in the areas of exercise physiology and clinical psychology, and is supported by a specialist physician.

### Why a multi-disciplinary clinic?

A large amount of scientific evidence has demonstrated that activity pacing, graded exercise therapy (GET), and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) delivered by an expert team of healthcare professionals is an effective treatment for people diagnosed with a fatigue disorder. While there has been some controversy about the effectiveness of the intervention (i.e how much improvement and what proportion of patients improve?), and concerns raised about the safety of GET (i.e is it harmful to encourage physical exercise when patients are struggling with fatigue?) the experts in the UNSW Fatigue Clinic have regularly reviewed the scientific evidence and found it to be positive, and have more than a decade of experience in delivering the intervention without serious concern at any time.

The exercise physiologist assesses the functional capacity of the individual and their unique fatigue patterns and triggers, before prescribing an individually tailored activity program. This includes activity-pacing techniques to balance limited energy supplies against day-to-day demands, followed by a carefully-monitored (home-based) graded activity program to increase physical activity levels.

In addition, it is well recognised that people with a fatigue disorder commonly also experience cognitive disturbances (i.e., concentration and short-term memory difficulties), as well as disturbances in sleep-wake routine and mood. The clinical psychologist employs cognitive-behavioural therapy, cognitive exercise therapy (CET) and sleep hygiene strategies to manage these issues.

These two components of the program are closely integrated and so can only be provided in a combined format. The *UNSW Fatigue Clinic* service requires the support of your treating doctor in ensuring the referral is appropriate. The service is offered only to patients for whom all other possible causes of fatigue (such as



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anaemia or thyroid disease) have been excluded, and who have no other significant medical problems which would prevent them from participating.

### What does the Fatigue Clinic Program involve for you?

- The program runs over eighteen (18) weeks, five (5) consultations with an exercise physiologist and five (5) with a clinical psychologist. The treatment approach is based on training you in the principles of self-management. All the appointments are scheduled in advance.
- The first appointments are with both the exercise physiologist and clinical psychologist (each taking about 45-50 minutes).
- The final appointment occurs one to three months after completion of the program and is with the clinical psychologist.
- We strongly encourage the initial appointments to occur in person at the Clinic, but if this is not possible (e.g., it is too far to travel), the program may be completed with a combination of virtual and face-to-face consultations or even fully virtually. The virtual consultations are generally conducted via Microsoft Teams. The Clinic will send a Microsoft Teams meeting email invitation one week before the scheduled consultation date. These virtual consultations require a stable internet connection, camera, and headset with a microphone.

The Fatigue Clinic Program is a 18-week structured schedule with 11 individual appointments (6 x clinical psychologist [CP], 5 x exercise physiologist [EP]) over a total of eight visits.

Week	Clinician	Content
1	CP	Psychological assessment – clinical interview
	EP	Functional capacity assessment – clinical interview Provide activity diary
3	CP	Introduction to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) Introduce strategies to address issues regarding depression, anxiety, coping, or sleep disturbance
	EP	Review activity diary Implement activity pacing Provide step count diary



5	CP	Review activity pacing Address barriers to activity pacing Re-visit strategies relating to depression, anxiety, coping, or sleep disturbance
7	EP	Introduce cognitive exercise therapy (CET) and graded exercise therapy (GET)
9	CP	Address barriers to pacing, CET and/or GET Review strategies relating to depression, anxiety, coping, or sleep disturbance Progress CET and GET
11	CP	Review strategies relating to depression, anxiety, coping, or sleep disturbance Review CET and GET progress Address barriers to CET/GET
	EP	Progress CET and GET
15	CP	Review and progress CET and GET Goal setting for the post-intervention period External referrals for ongoing management of depression, anxiety, or coping (if required)
18	EP	Review CET/GET progress Goal setting for the post-intervention period Implement longer-term plan for GET and CET

### What happens when you arrive at the clinic?

#### *Before your first appointment*

- Prior to your first appointment you will receive an email with a link to complete a series of questionnaires which ask about your symptoms and function. The questionnaires take about 20 minutes to complete. We ask that you complete these questionnaires 48 hours before your appointments.
- You do not have to complete the questionnaires in one sitting, you will have the option to save and return later. If you choose to complete the questionnaires in person at the Clinic, we ask that you arrive at least 20-30 minutes before your scheduled appointment to give you enough time to complete them.
- The information obtained from these questionnaires will complement the information obtained from the initial interview to allow the treating team to individually tailor the program to you.



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- We will ask you to repeat the online questionnaires again in the middle of the program, at the end of the program (18 weeks), and at 36 and 48 weeks after the program. The questionnaires are a key part of monitoring progress and success of the program.

#### *During your first appointment*

- During your first appointment, you will consult with the exercise physiologist and clinical psychologist (each taking about 45-50 minutes). Before your scheduled appointment with the exercise physiologist you will be emailed a link to a 10-14-day Activity Diary to record the details of your sleep and activity patterns over the following two weeks. Instructions on how to complete the Activity Diary will be provided by the exercise physiologist during the first consultation. You will have the option of completing this Diary in your preferred format (Excel, PDF, Word, or hard copy). You will be required to purchase an activity monitor (e.g. pedometer, Fitbit) to record your activity during the day. This information will help the exercise physiologist and clinical psychologist to better understand your activity patterns and how they relate to symptom fluctuations, to develop the ideal management program for you. The forward plan in the program will be designed in collaboration between all three parties: the exercise physiologist, the clinical psychologist, and the patient.
- You will be expected to complete the activities agreed to in the forward plan at home, and to implement the agreed strategies to address any other associated symptoms of your illness. The remaining visits during the 18-week program are crucial for monitoring your progress and upgrading your activity levels periodically. Most importantly, the sessions are to identify and address the likely barriers that arise during your treatment program.

#### **Does the *UNSW Fatigue Clinic* also do research?**

As part of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of NSW, the UNSW Fatigue Clinic has a strong research agenda. You will be invited to take part in research which involves both the evaluation of the Fatigue Clinic Program (referred to here as the Fatigue Clinic Evaluation) and to join the Research Registry. The Fatigue Clinic Evaluation simply seeks your permission to use the de-identified data from your questionnaires to evaluate the UNSW Fatigue Clinic Program. The Research Registry invites you to have your details included in the UNSW Fatigue Clinic Volunteer Research Register. The purpose of this register is to notify you about future research studies in which you may be interested in taking part in. Please note you are not obliged to agree to participate in these research studies, it is just an offer. Whether you consent or not to allow us to use your data or join the UNSW Fatigue Clinic Volunteer Research Register, you will still need to complete the questionnaires as they are



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part of ensuring the best clinical care for you in UNSW Fatigue Clinic Program. You will be provided with further information about this research via email once you are enrolled in the Fatigue Clinic Program.

### How much does it cost?

If you have been referred by your GP under a Care Plan you will receive the Medicare rebate as per the table below. This can be processed by the administration team at the Clinic and the Medicare receipt is emailed to you after full payment of the consult (there is no need to take your receipt to Medicare). The fees should be paid by you in full at each appointment. For virtual consultations, the invoice will be emailed to you and payment is required within 24 hours. Payments can only be made by debit or credit card (no cash).

- Patients must be referred under an *-GP Management Plan & Team Care Arrangement* (Item 721 & 723) by their GP to be eligible for a Medicare rebate for the Exercise Physiology services. The rebate is \$61.80 per session for a maximum of 5 sessions within a 12-month period.
- Patients must be referred under a *Mental Health Treatment Plan* (Item 2710) to be eligible for a Medicare rebate for the clinical psychology services. The rebate is \$145.25 per session for 5-6 sessions in a 12-month period. The rebate may be extended for an additional 4 sessions following the 6<sup>th</sup> session (i.e. a total of 10 sessions) on approval by the GP.
- All patients with a valid Medicare card and a valid GP referral will receive the Medicare rebate. Patients with a current Healthcare card, are on the Disability support pension or under National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) will be bulk billed.
- For patients who have used all of the Medicare-rebated Allied Health and Mental Health sessions for the calendar year, the consultations will be invoiced as full fee. This will also apply if you are ineligible for these referrals (you should discuss this with your GP).

The program fees are as follows:

Per appointment costs:			
Clinical Psychologist		Exercise Physiologist	
Appointment Cost	\$250.00	Appointment Cost	\$120.00
Medicare Rebate	\$145.25	Medicare Rebate	\$61.80
Out-of-Pocket	\$104.75	Out-of-Pocket	\$58.20



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This means over the course of your 18-week Treatment Program you will pay:

\$523.75 Clinical Psychologist (5-6 appointments)

\$291.00 Exercise Physiologist (5 appointments)

### What documentation is needed?

We ask that you provide us with the following documents in order for you to attend the UNSW Fatigue Clinic Program. You will find this information and be able to upload these documents via the online Program Application form.

1. Specialist or GP referral cover letter addressed to UNSW Fatigue Clinic - with medical history and current medications included.
2. UNSW Fatigue Clinic GP Screening checklist. This is to be completed by your GP or specialist, and is a means of ensuring you have been adequately investigated for other conditions that may explain your fatigue. Your specialist/GP will complete this Checklist from your most recent full blood test results (within 6 months). Note - if you have been referred by a specialist physician (e.g., immunologist, infectious diseases physician, rheumatologist), you do not need to complete the GP screening checklist.
3. GP Management Plan & Team Care Arrangement. This referral is a prerequisites for receiving the Medicare rebate from the Exercise Physiology services.
4. Mental Health Treatment Plan. This referral is a prerequisites for receiving the Medicare rebate from the Clinical psychology services.

You can either download these documents via the online Program application form or your GP can download them from the website <https://www.fatigueclinic.unsw.edu.au/for-healthcare-professionals>

If the referral is for a patient 16 years old or younger, it is a prerequisite to provide a letter or report from a paediatrician (this can be uploaded online, via the Program Application form).

You will be able to upload other additional documents such as specialist letters, laboratory blood test results, scans, or sleep study results.

Please note that you will be **offered appointments only when all these documents have been completed** and reviewed by administration to check eligibility.

The UNSW Fatigue Clinic does not accept referrals from WorkCover and is not a NDIS or insurance provider. We accept private paying patients, private health insurance and patients referred by their GP under Medicare.

Please note that we do not provide reports or letter for NDIS or DSP. This is best obtained from your GP. We will provide an initial and final letter to your GP advising them of your progress in the program.



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## Cancellation Policy

The UNSW Fatigue Clinic operates on an appointment only basis. As the appointment schedule is booked for 18 weeks in advance, and there is a long waiting list, we require **at least 24 hours' notice of cancellation prior to your scheduled appointment** to enable other patients to be scheduled into that session. Any cancellation should be in **writing via email** ([fatigueclinic@unsw.edu.au](mailto:fatigueclinic@unsw.edu.au)). Without such prior notice, the cancellation fee is 50% of the full fee for the appointment that has not been attended.