

## Service Leads

**Dr Jayne Martlew**

Consultant Neuropsychologist

**Dr Christine Burness**

Consultant Neurologist

The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

Lower Lane

Fazakerley

Liverpool

L9 7LJ

Telephone:

0151 556 3179 / 0151 556 3183

Web: <http://www.thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk>



The Brain Charity offers emotional support, practical help, and social activities to anyone with a neurological condition. We also provide support for family, friends and carers.

Tel: 0151 298 2999

For practical advice our Patient Experience Team can be of assistance.

Tel: 0151 556 3090

email:

[patientexperienceteam@thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk)

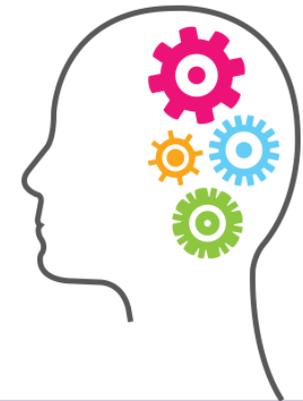
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The Walton Centre   
NHS Foundation Trust

## Functional Neurological Disorders



*Your questions answered*

Neurology  
Neuropsychology

0151 556 3179 / 0151 556 3183

*Excellence in Neuroscience*



## What is a Functional Neurological Disorder?

This term describes a problem with the functioning of the nervous system in a structurally normal brain. *Functional neurological disorders (FND)* are common and account for up to a third of outpatient neurology attendances. They include weakness, non-epileptic attacks, involuntary movements, speech problems or any neurological symptom.

The reasons people develop functional symptoms are complicated. They tend to happen when the brain has difficulty coping with thoughts, memories, emotions and sensations. This can be associated with stress but this is not always the case. Up to thirty percent of people have no obvious cause for their symptoms.

The development of functional symptoms may be related to things that people have little or no control over, such as loss of a loved one, relationship difficulties, or trauma of any kind. It tends to be more common in people who are seen as strong personalities and who frequently put others' needs before their own.

People with functional symptoms do NOT consciously produce these symptoms. They are NOT 'mad' or "making it up". Functional symptoms cause financial, physical, mental and emotional distress and cannot be turned on and off at will.

## How can I be sure that this is the right diagnosis?

Functional symptoms can be diagnosed and recognised by their clinical features just like any other medical or neurological disorder. The symptoms often vary in their nature and also in their severity over time. This can be distressing but also supports the diagnosis.

## Why have I been given different explanations for my symptoms?

In the early stages, functional disorders may look similar to other neurological illnesses and so people may be told that they have a different condition or that no cause can be found. It sometimes takes time to reach the diagnosis.

## What treatment can I have?

Not everyone with functional symptoms needs or wants treatment. Often there is a relief and even a reduction in the symptoms when the diagnosis is made and explained.

For some people, psychotherapy may be of benefit. This involves talking through the symptoms with a therapist and exploring possible links with previous and current experiences. This can help people to gain control over their symptoms and to deal with stress.

Physiotherapy can help some people.

## Will medication help me?

Treating anxiety and depression can help with functional symptoms and antidepressants may help even when people are not actually depressed or anxious.

## Will I get better?

People with FND can recover fully and in most cases do. On the other hand, some people have very persistent and disabling symptoms.

## What can I do to help myself ?

It is important to come to terms with the diagnosis of functional symptoms. It is difficult for people to get better if they continue to look for a physical explanation for their symptoms. Talking to friends and family about your symptoms and how you feel can be very helpful. There are also some techniques to try in our leaflet 'Taking control of your functional symptoms'.

