

FACT SHEET

Cystic Fibrosis

What is Cystic Fibrosis?

Cystic Fibrosis or CF is the most common, fatal genetic disease affecting young Canadians. CF affects mainly the lungs and the digestive system. In the lungs, CF causes severe breathing problems. A build-up of thick mucus makes it difficult to clear bacteria and leads to cycles of infection and inflammation, which damage the delicate lung tissues.

In the digestive tract, CF makes it extremely difficult to digest and absorb adequate nutrients from food. Thick mucus also blocks the ducts of the pancreas, preventing enzymes from reaching the intestines to digest food. Therefore, persons with CF must consume a large number of artificial enzymes (on average 20 pills a day) with every meal and snack, to help them absorb adequate nutrition from their food. They must also follow a demanding daily routine of physical therapy to keep the lungs free of congestion and infection.

How is it manifested?

- difficulty breathing
- constant cough which expels thick mucus
- excessive appetite, with weight loss
- bowel disturbances
- skin which tastes salty
- repeated or prolonged bouts of pneumonia
- failure to thrive

Who is affected?

It is estimated that 1 in every 2,500 children born in Canada has CF.

How is it diagnosed or detected?

If a physician suspects CF, he will probably suggest a “sweat test”. This simple and painless test measures the amount of salt in the sweat. A high salt level, along with other symptoms, points to the presence of Cystic Fibrosis.

Increasingly, genetic tests are being used in the diagnosis of the disease. Genetic tests are also used to diagnose CF prenatally.

Approximately 60% of patients are diagnosed in the first year of life, and 90% by 10 years of age.

Additional Resources:

CANADIAN CYSTIC FIBROSIS FOUNDATION

- www.cysticfibrosis.ca

The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (CCFF) is a Canada-wide health charity with more than 50 volunteer chapters. The Foundation’s primary objective is to fund cystic fibrosis research and care. The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is one of the world’s largest non-governmental granting agencies in the field of cystic fibrosis research.

Videos are available from the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. You may borrow a copy by calling 1-800-378-2233 or by sending an e-mail to info@cysticfibrosis.ca