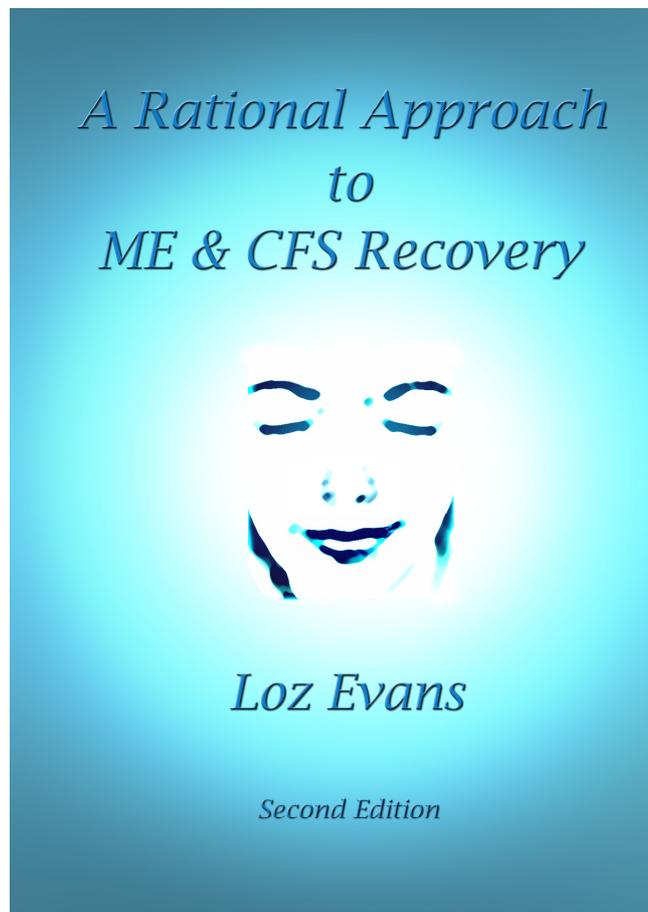


***A Rational Approach  
to  
ME & CFS Recovery***



***Loz Evans***

***Second Edition  
2009***

*With thanks to Neal, Philippe and Brechtje*

First published by Loz Evans 2008

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Loz Evans asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

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*Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said;  
"One can't believe impossible things."  
"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen.  
"When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've  
believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."  
– Lewis Carroll. 'Alice in Wonderland.'*

*Part One*

# **The Beginning of the End of M.E.**

## **About the Author**

- Practical Stuff

## **The Medical Diagnosis for M.E**

## **Medical Research and Treatments**

- Your Misunderstood Condition

## **An Overview of What Causes M.E**

## **The Development of My Methods**

- How Hearing About The Lightning Process Encouraged Me  
- Experimenting

# About the Author

I'm twenty-nine years old and originally from Leamington Spa. I'm not a doctor and currently I'm not any other kind of practitioner. I became very ill with M.E. in November 2005. I had the usual tests such as a brain scan, a nerve conduction test, blood tests, and I saw many doctors before my diagnosis of M.E. was confirmed.

I experienced severe classic M.E. symptoms for prolonged periods of time. I was bed bound for three months when I was unable to sit up for long and I was housebound for another five months. It took me a year to recover fully.

The realness or severity of my illness could be questioned because it only lasted for one year, but I'm hoping people will instead ask why and how it only lasted for one year. My M.E. didn't just go away by itself. There are certain methods that I used and developed to make it go away.

These methods are focused around amygdala re-education, proper relaxation and being happy. The methods I will describe are simple, down to earth, logical, and I hope easy to understand. I have called my main two methods '*The Stop Method*' and '*Reclaim Yourself*.'

## Practical Stuff

'*The Stop Method*' is contained in this book. '*Reclaim Yourself*' is explained in this book, but the method itself comes as an accompanying audio CD. If you do not have '*Reclaim Yourself*,' please email me. My **email** address is: **a.rational.approach@googlemail.com**

This book and the accompanying CD go together, so it's important that you do have both. '*Reclaim Yourself*' is an **essential** part of the recovery process and should be listened to **after** reading this book. (Please note: Some people reported they did not listen to '*Reclaim Yourself*' for some time after reading this book, but once they did they realised just how useful it was and they wished they'd listened to it earlier!).

If you find that this book helps you and you have acquired it for free, please consider making a donation to support my efforts. Any contribution is appreciated as I can only afford to do this work in my spare time.

How to donate:

1. Please email me for an address to send a cheque or postal order to. Cheques should be made payable to 'L. Evans.' Or...
2. Pay with Paypal. Log into your Paypal account and click the 'send money' tab at the top. Fill in the amount you wish to pay and to which email:

**a.rational.approach@googlemail.com**

Clicking the 'personal' tab allows you to send money as a gift.

Whether you can afford to donate or not, the most important issue is your recovery. So, if after reading this book you feel the methods in it are right for you, but you are still having trouble putting them into practice, you are welcome to email me at the above address. I am happy to do telephone consultations. It doesn't matter whether you have donated or not, (and I won't ask you if you have!) I will do the best I can to help you. Please note that I will try to reply as quickly as possible, but reply time depends on the volume of emails I receive.

# The Medical Diagnosis for M.E

I'm sure you're familiar with the long list of symptoms associated with M.E. I will briefly mention them now however as this is the only method by which one can classify the condition. Please note that when I use the term '*M.E.*,' I am also referring to '*Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.*'

There are currently over sixty reported symptoms for M.E. Here are the most common:

- **Extreme fatigue.** Literally feeling as though the plug has been pulled out and energy drained from the body. There is often an urgent need to sit or lie down, feelings of total exhaustion and near collapse. This fatigue is not the same as normal tiredness, nor is it the same as the type of exhaustion healthy people refer to.
- **Headaches, leg pain, muscular pain and twitching.** For some pain is chronic. Other sufferers hardly get any pain. Many sufferers report skin crawling and tingling sensations.
- **Extreme weakness.** Sinking feelings, as if melting through the floor were possible.
- **Paralysis** in certain parts of the body or all over, (paralysis can last for days).
- **Un-refreshing sleep, insomnia** and nocturnal behaviour, inability to wake in the mornings, feeling like ten hours sleep was only ten minutes.
- **Very severe throat pain,** sore throat, recurring flu-like symptoms.
- **Poor short-term memory and brain fog** causing speech problems, difficulty in finding words and forming sentences, confusion, lack of concentration and comprehension.
- **Clumsiness, dizziness, balance problems, feelings of disequilibria** likened to 'walking on rubber,' or being on a boat.
- **Problems with nervous system control** causing palpitations, unusual sweating and low blood pressure symptoms such as hypotension. Bad skin condition, spots, pale and puffy skin.
- **Temperature disturbances.** Feeling cold when it's hot and hot when it's cold, very cold hands and feet.
- **Disassociation syndrome. Mental disturbances,** mood swings, anxiety and depression (mostly due to illness).
- **Sensitivity to noise and light** to the point where they can be painful.
- **Nausea, Irritable Bowel Syndrome,** weight gain or weight loss.
- **Food, chemical and drug sensitivities.** Intolerance to alcohol.

This list by no means covers every symptom. For a much more detailed list you can consult this website: [www.ahummingbirdsguide.com/themesymptomlist.htm](http://www.ahummingbirdsguide.com/themesymptomlist.htm)

Until recently positive ideas about actively curing M.E. were scarce. Most of the advice given was based on taking care not to aggravate the illness.

On being diagnosed with M.E. most are told to try methods such as pacing, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), or to avoid overexertion and avoid certain food groups. Some sufferers are also advised they should try and learn to live with the condition.

The methods I will tell you about are different because they're based on actively confronting the illness. They are simple and logical and because of this they take a lot of determination and commitment to put into practice. The more you use them however, the easier they get.

# Medical Research and Treatments

Whilst ill I looked into current medical treatments for M.E. such as magnesium injections and vitamin supplements and I read a lot about scientific research into M.E. The research was all very good but it seemed that most of it examined the symptoms of M.E. and not the root cause.

What baffled me was that as medical science has such a strong repertoire for conquering some very powerful diseases such as Cancer, Leprosy and Polio, why could it not put a finger on M.E.? If M.E. were a neurological illness or some kind of prolonged virus, you would've expected medical science to have come up with a solution by now given its past achievements, but it hasn't.

Of course it can tell us about what the symptoms are and it can provide treatments to help with some of those symptoms, but it's when we question what the root of M.E. actually is and how that can be dealt with, that medical science fails.

This suggests that perhaps M.E. originates from problems that can't and shouldn't be treated with drug-based regimes. Just as counselling would be no good to mend a broken leg, medical science and drug-based regimes may not be a good option for attempting to resolve M.E.

## Your Misunderstood Condition

Until recently M.E. has been very misunderstood. Research into curing M.E. has become so complex that sufferers are often led to believe it is a very impossible condition to treat. M.E. is a very serious condition but that doesn't mean the cure has to be complicated.

Take the name '*M.E.*' which stands for '*Myalgic Encephalomyelitis.*' This also adds to the misunderstanding of what M.E. actually is.

'*Myalgic*' means muscular pain or tenderness, which can be a symptom. '*Encephalomyelitis*' means inflammation of the brain and spinal cord, which is not a symptom. So this name does not properly represent the condition and it basically makes M.E. seem more mysterious and misunderstood.

Unfortunately when we cannot understand an illness or problem properly, we often imagine the worst. That is human nature. So you have perhaps thought that you have a severe medical condition likened to Multiple Sclerosis or Lyme disease, but I don't think you have such a condition.

M.E. isn't a persistent virus and it isn't a disease. M.E. is a physical condition that can be cured using mental processes, relaxation and body and mind techniques. It can be corrected without drugs and medical treatment.

Please do not read my book and also read M.E. forums that discuss the barriers with M.E. recovery because there's no scientific cure. The cure is not scientific, it's personal, straightforward and down to you. Don't let others bring you down and get in your way of your recovery. As the following nicely puts:

*'People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.'*

- **George Bernard Shaw**

# An Overview of What Causes M.E.

We usually have emotional energy of one form or another travelling through our bodies. Because of this energy we know when we don't like something, we know when we are happy and we know when we love somebody. Humans understand emotional energy and know how it feels in the body. For example a 'butterflies in the stomach' feeling tells us we're nervous. Our emotional energy helps us to make decisions in life that will be beneficial for us.

We can refer to the healthiness of emotional energy as our '*well-being*.' M.E. occurs when a person's emotional well-being becomes so low that they are physically affected by it.

It is healthy to act on emotional energy. For example someone is angry, they shout and then they feel better. The emotional energy served its purpose and the anger is gone. A person's emotional well-being can become low when they don't act on emotional sensations or feelings. This often happens because we feel it's not appropriate or we are not comfortable with expressing an emotion.

If we ignore emotional energy, the brain can turn up its communication of the neglected emotion and make the sensation of it feel even stronger in the body. So if you are working on a project because you feel you must, even though you don't want to finish it, headaches, stiffness or feelings of being a little rundown may occur because you are neglecting the feeling that you've had enough of that project. If after such warnings a person continues to neglect an important emotional sensation, the brain can again step up the communication of that emotion until the emotional energy becomes so intense that the reason behind it is lost. It then becomes unrecognisable as an emotional sensation and instead is understood to be a symptom of something.

If prolonged a person's survival instinct will pick up on these symptoms or physical effects and because a person may have no explanation for those effects, their survival instinct will label them as a threat and put the body into a heightened state of alert. People then often come to the conclusion that they have some incurable illness because the symptoms have no apparent reason for existing. There is no infection and no disease.

## **As an M.E. sufferer there are three things you can do that will work together for your recovery:**

1. Resolve the factors in your life that are causing your emotional well-being to be low
2. Ensure you maintain a healthy emotional well-being.
3. Bring your body out of the heightened state of alert that it's in.

To do these you must rebuild your confidence and trust in yourself, physically and mentally.

I'm not going to talk about CBT or Psychotherapy. The methods I will explain are different because they are precisely aimed at the root cause of M.E.

The root cause of M.E. lies in a part of the brain called the '*Amygdala*.' Recovery lies in re-educating this part of the brain and weakening the neural pathways that it has been using to generate your symptoms.

So far these neural pathways have been constantly strengthened. This is because it's natural to evaluate symptoms to establish what's wrong with us. It's also natural to take great care not to

irritate symptoms. These natural responses mean we pay attention to the symptoms constantly and we are always aware of them. And paying attention to the symptoms in such ways means that the neural pathways the amygdala uses to generate them are constantly being exercised, so they become strong.

In other words, a sufferer can empower their symptoms and make them worse just through having thoughts and an awareness of them. Of course the catch is that when you have M.E. it is very hard to ignore the symptoms. Your attention subconsciously or consciously is generally on them and you therefore will be exercising the brain's ability to produce them. This is why people get stuck with M.E. for so long, it's a catch twenty-two situation.

For now please put aside theories of what M.E. is or how it should be treated. Forget about all the M.E. medical articles you've read. There are a few treatments I will mention in this book that are good for helping with M.E. Aside from those, please discard old ideas and start with a clean slate.

I hope the following story will help you understand what I mean.

*Two Buddhist monks were on a long journey when they came to a river.*

*On the bank sat a young woman.*

*"I beg you," she asked, "Could you carry me across?"*

*The current is strong and I'm afraid I might be swept away."*

*The first monk remembered his vows never to look at or touch a woman, so he ignored her and crossed the heavily flowing river. The other monk bent down so that the woman could climb upon his back. When they reached the other side, he let her down and went on his way. After some hours the first monk could no longer contain his anger at the second for breaking their vows.*

*"How could you even look at that woman, let alone carry her across the river?"*

*The first monk looked at his companion and smiled,*

*"I put the woman down way back there on the riverbank. You're still carrying her."*

***'You're Still Carrying Her' - A Zen Buddhist story***

# The Development of My Methods

There are two main methods that I developed to overcome M.E. These methods partly originate from a mixture of treatments that I've either read about or experienced.

They are: Reverse Therapy, Mickel Therapy, The Lightning Process, Meditation, Relaxation, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and The Linden Method.

*'The Linden Method'* is a cure for anxiety.

*'The Lightning Process'* is a cure for M.E., anxiety and other conditions.

Judging by their websites and recovery stories, The Linden Method and The Lightning Process are very successful. They are also aimed at **re-educating the amygdala**. You only have to look at websites, forums and articles about M.E. or anxiety to soon come across a mention of them and how they have worked. On the M.E. forums that I used, there were many people who had recovered through taking Lightning Process training. The only thing was that they often didn't come back to the forums to talk about their recovery and that confused continuing sufferers. But what I didn't realise then when I used to question why all these people didn't come back to the forum and tell us about how they'd recovered in order to give us hope, is that part of their recovery process would probably involve completely putting M.E. behind them, which means staying away from the M.E. forums and groups. I know this because once you understand the nature of M.E. it becomes obvious that you need to stay away from reminders of it. You'll understand the point of this once you've read this book.

## How Hearing About The Lightning Process Encouraged Me

Over the last few years you may have heard of The Lightning Process. It was developed by Phil Parker in 2000 and is a training course that teaches people how to cure their M.E.

I never took The Lightning Process (LP), and I don't know much about it as you can't really know much until you pay for it. But I have been told by a sufferer who did take LP and who also read my book that one of my methods is very similar to LP, practically the same in fact. So this is good for us to know as LP has become very well known in M.E. circles, because it works.

Anyway, on The Lightning Process website I noticed that Phil Parker had said that he found there was a pattern in the way people with M.E. think. This interested me and I paid more attention to my thoughts from then on.

Basically I noticed that whenever I decided I'd need LP to get better or any other treatment; my symptoms worsened. Also when I was at the doctors my symptoms worsened. Whenever I wasn't thinking about needing treatments and when I thought to myself, *'I'm going to be better by the end of the year, I can sort this out myself,'* my symptoms died down, just a little.

This small realisation was a breakthrough in understanding M.E. I knew then that my thinking was going to play a part in my recovery. So I experimented.

## Experimenting

I first experimented with my thoughts by literally trying to see how long I could go without thinking from the moment I woke up. I would keep a song in my head, anything to stop my regular thoughts rolling in. I managed to keep this up through breakfast and then I'd revert back to my usual state of mind.

I noticed that thought blocking did make me feel marginally better, but of course it's not possible to go round without thinking all day. So I decided to try something a little more unusual.

I liked the theory behind the treatment called Reverse Therapy and as this is based on resolving inflammation of the hypothalamus, a small part in the brain related to adrenalin release, I based my initial experiments on resolving this. Although my health improved a surprising amount over two days, I lacked confidence in my method. With no professional body to reassure me, I worried that my M.E. would catch up with me in the form of a big relapse. So for a while I stopped working on my thoughts. That was until I read about the work of a neuroscientist called Joseph LeDoux.

His work suggested to me that the part of the brain responsible for M.E. is the amygdala, not the hypothalamus. The amygdala produces the symptoms of M.E. through unconsciously stored negative emotions. I will describe the role of the amygdala in a moment.

Encouraged by these findings I started using my methods again whilst focusing on the amygdala instead of the hypothalamus. My M.E. symptoms again decreased quickly and I soon felt completely free of M.E., which was quite an amazing feeling.

So now I aim to present the methods I used in simple detail so that you can try them out and hopefully find them as useful as I did.

## *Part Two*

# Getting to The Root of the Problem

## **The Emotional Brain and The Thinking Brain**

- Sensory Messages
  - The Brain Stem (The Reptilian Brain)
  - The Limbic System (The Emotional Brain)
    - Core Emotions
  - The Amygdala (Emergency Fight or Flight Response Unit)
    - Flight or Fight
  - The Neocortex (The Thinking Brain)
- Sensory Message Pathways and The Thalamus (Air Traffic Controller)
  - More on The Amygdala
  - Hijacking of The Amygdala

## **The Start of M.E.**

- The Continuation of M.E.
- What's in a Name

## **The Hippocampus and Memory**

### **Emotional Memories**

- Creating New Emotional Memories
  - Fun – The Important Ingredient
  - The Selfish Inner Child
- How Emotional Memories Work

## **What the Amygdala Will Respond to**

- Real or Imagined...It's All the Same to Your Emotional Brain

# The Emotional Brain and The Thinking Brain

Although there is a lot of technical information now on the amygdala and brain, I have included it so that you can understand in detail the parts of the brain that are involved in M.E. and the processes that they use.

Having an understanding of this empowers us to think that what is going on is not some great mystery beyond our control, but boils down to simple processes that we can alter ourselves to help get better.

## Sensory Messages

Every moment your five senses: sight, sound, taste, smell and touch, are sending messages to your brain about your environment. Your brain decides how you should react to them and instructs your body to carry out that reaction.

When you smell lovely food your brain processes that smell and decides how you should react. Reaction commands are sent to the relevant parts of your body:

Your mouth waters, you lick your lips and say, *'That smells good!'*

When you touch a hot plate your brain processes the danger of burning your finger and instructs your hand to immediately stop touching the plate.

In order to understand how to stop M.E, you will need to know a little about how your brain receives and processes these sensory messages.

**The parts of the brain you need to know about are explained next...**

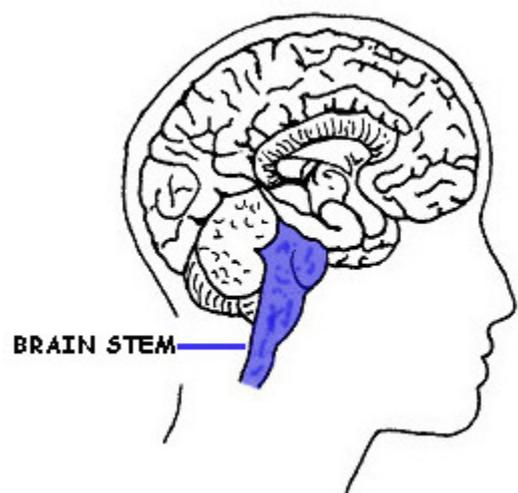
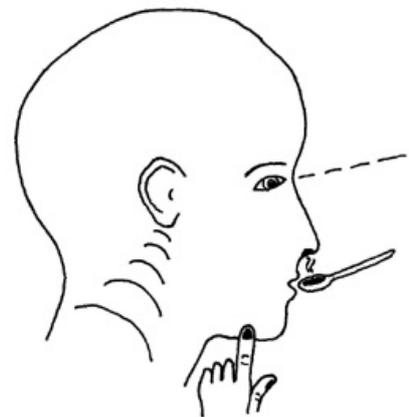
## The Brain Stem (The Reptilian Brain)

Just above the back of the neck is the brain stem. It is responsible for controlling many life support mechanisms such as heart rate, breathing, digestion and circulation.

It is the least evolved part of the brain and is no more advanced than a reptile brain.

With only the brain stem responses to sensory messages would be very primitive like the reactions of a snake. Reactions would be based only on survival.

The brain stem cannot learn what reaction is best in what situation because it has no capacity to memorise.



*For your recovery it's not essential that you remember this information about the brain stem.*

## **The Limbic System (The Emotional Brain)**

We refer to the limbic system as the '**Emotional Brain.**' It uses the word '**limbic**' which is Latin for '**ring,**' because it sits like a ring on top of the brain stem.

Unlike the primitive brain stem, the emotional brain can learn, because it is able to store core emotions you've experienced as memories. The emotional brain stores core emotional memories as stagnant energy in the amygdala.

So the amygdala will store an instinctual emotional memory that touching a hot plate is painful. Then unlike a snake you'll know not to touch a hot plate again.

The emotional brain is not capable of thought or rationalising. We feel core emotions like fear without the need to think about them, they are instinctual.

*For your recovery it's good to understand more about the core emotions that occur instinctually, before we have chance to think about them.*

## **Core Emotions**

Many experts say that our '**core**' emotions are joy, anger, disgust, fear and sadness. The amygdala is responsible for triggering the negative of these emotions, so not joy.

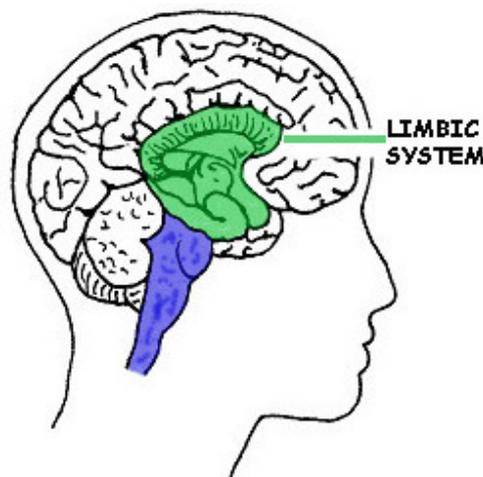
(Joy or happiness occurs when there's an absence of negative emotion along with activity in the brains' ventromedial cortex. The ventromedial cortex is where meaning is given to our perceptions giving a feeling of cohesiveness. Things can seem pointless and fragmented without it.)

*For your recovery you don't need to remember anything about the ventromedial cortex, I just found it interesting.*

Core emotions triggered by the amygdala are negative – fear, disgust, anger, and sadness - because for our survival it is compulsory that we recognise possible negative threats quickly as there is not always time to think.

If a sensory message (something you hear or see for example) triggers a core negative emotion, the amygdala in the emotional brain will cause you to give an instinctual response. So if an emotional memory of fear is triggered, the amygdala will tell the hairs on the back of your neck to stand up, your palms to sweat, your heart to pump faster and your pupils to dilate. That instinctual response would make you more alert to any danger.

*The amygdala is responsible for generating negative emotions, so to prevent them (negative emotions) from flooding the brain this part of the limbic system must be quiet. Working hard on non-emotional mental tasks inhibits the amygdala, which is why keeping busy is often said to be the source of happiness. - 'Mapping the Mind' by Rita Carter (1)*



The previous extract from *'Mapping the Mind'* is very relevant when it comes to M.E. recovery as it basically explains part of the recovery process in a nutshell! Your symptoms are emotional responses that have gone out of control, responses such as when blood is sent to the muscles or the pupils dilate when the amygdala senses a threat. By not allowing activity in the amygdala to occur (which you can do by using other parts of the brain that aren't related to emotions, so by doing non-emotional distractions or tasks such as maths) you can stop the amygdala from being able to trigger symptoms and you can give it much needed resting time so that it can recover.

## The Amygdala (Emergency Fight or Flight Response Unit)

The *'amygdala,'* is an almond-shaped cluster located in the emotional brain. Amygdala comes from the Greek for *'almond.'* *'Amygdale,'* is the plural version as in the limbic system, you have one on the left and one on the right.

The amygdala acts as the central control station for your core emotional circuitry. When the amygdala senses fear or danger, it sends out alarm calls via neural pathways to every major part of the brain. (In the case of M.E., it's constantly sending out alarm calls and causing the sufferer to be on permanent red alert).

The amygdala can quickly activate reflexes, facial expressions of fear and the release of hormones used in fight or flight activity. This can affect the body in many ways including changes in temperature, blood pressure, heart rate and even hearing.

The amygdala is responsible for what is called the *'fight or flight'* response. It links a learned sensory message (man with knife) to an adaptive response (run/fight or flight). It can make split second decisions that can save your life.

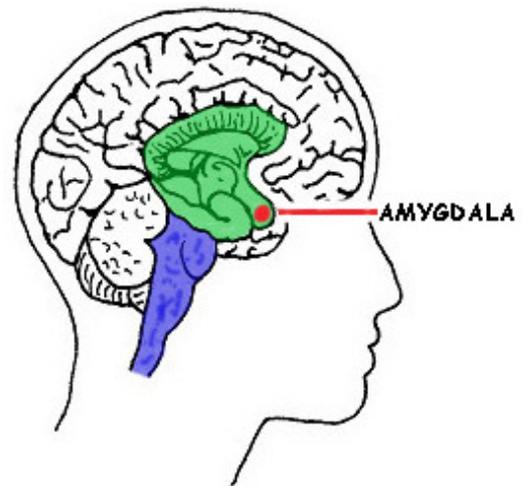
If you remember only one word about the amygdala, that word is **FEAR**. The amygdala is responsible for the lurch you feel in your stomach when you turn around in a dark alley and notice someone is following you.

## Flight or Fight

When we are faced with a threat, the body produces substances in order to raise our levels of anxiety. This helps us become better equipped to deal with the threat. This reaction is what we know as the *'flight or fight'* response.

You sense danger and the brain orders the adrenal glands (at the top of your kidneys) to release adrenalin into your blood stream. It travels round your body to the heart, lungs and muscles and causes your body to make changes so that it can deal with the danger and be ready to run or fight.

So your muscles might need more oxygen in order to run or fight, therefore your breathing becomes faster and deeper. Your heart may beat faster so that this extra oxygen can get where it needs to go quickly. Then in the digestive system, which isn't important for running or fighting, you may get butterflies due to blood vessels contracting as they stop oxygen entering.



So at the sign of danger you experience specific bodily changes. These changes are all very positive if you do have to face danger. So if a wild dog is about to attack you, these changes will assist you in running to safety or fighting the dog off. The changes made by the fight or flight responses are then used up and the body returns to normal. If however, there was no real threat and your fight or flight response had been triggered, perhaps because you had got all worked up about having to have an injection at the doctors, then the body would take longer to return to normal. This is because the chemical changes wouldn't have been used up, for example by running or fighting. So your body would remain aroused and anxious for longer needing more time to normalise. The longer you spend in this aroused fight or flight state, perhaps because you have a stressful situation in your life, the more you will effectively be 'running on full throttle.' This is when you can get symptoms caused by the ongoing fight or flight response state.

These symptoms may be headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, dry mouth, difficulty, neck-ache, backache, breathing problems, palpitations, tightness in the chest, nausea, indigestion, sweating too much and needing to urinate more often.

Signals exiting the amygdala have been precisely identified as those that control the bodily reactions associated with fear. When heightened and prolonged, the bodily reactions associated with fear can cause some of the symptoms felt in M.E. Looking at the list of fight or flight response symptoms, you can see how they are a milder form of symptoms that can develop into more severe M.E. symptoms.

## The Neocortex (The Thinking Brain)

In contrast to the emotional brain is the thinking brain, which is called the '*neocortex.*' It's located above the limbic system. The thinking brain took millions of years to evolve into what it is today.

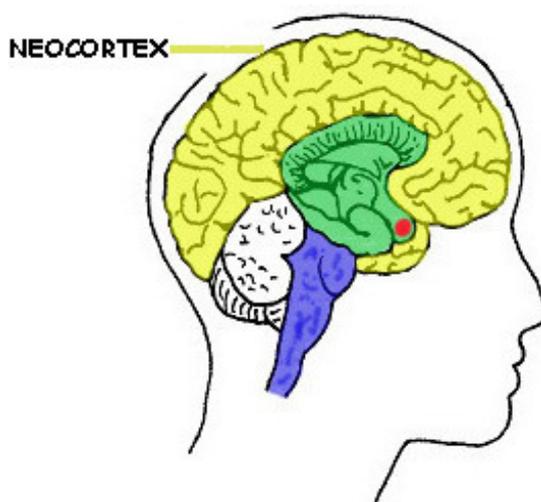
The thinking brain is responsible for language, conscious thought, ideas and creativity. It is because of this part of the brain that we have art, culture and intellectual evolution. The thinking brain is also responsible for the formation of complex non-instinctual emotions. For example, if you have the thoughts that you've done something wrong, you will feel guilty.

In stark contrast to the fast acting amygdala in the emotional brain, the thinking brain processes so much more information based on previous life experience and knowledge, that it needs much more time to recall and decide on a response to a sensory message.

A decision to react is made by your amygdala in the emotional brain, whilst the thinking brain (or neocortex), is still deciding what to do.

It is as though you have a wise old man and a child working together to make decisions about how you react in life.

Like a child, the amygdala decides quick responses using core emotions; whilst like an old man, the neocortex takes some time in carefully deciding what's best through drawing on knowledge, experience and wisdom.





*'Quick, I want to do this!'*



*'Hmmm...I don't know about that, let me consider the consequences...'*

### Sensory Message Pathways and The Thalamus (Air Traffic Controller)

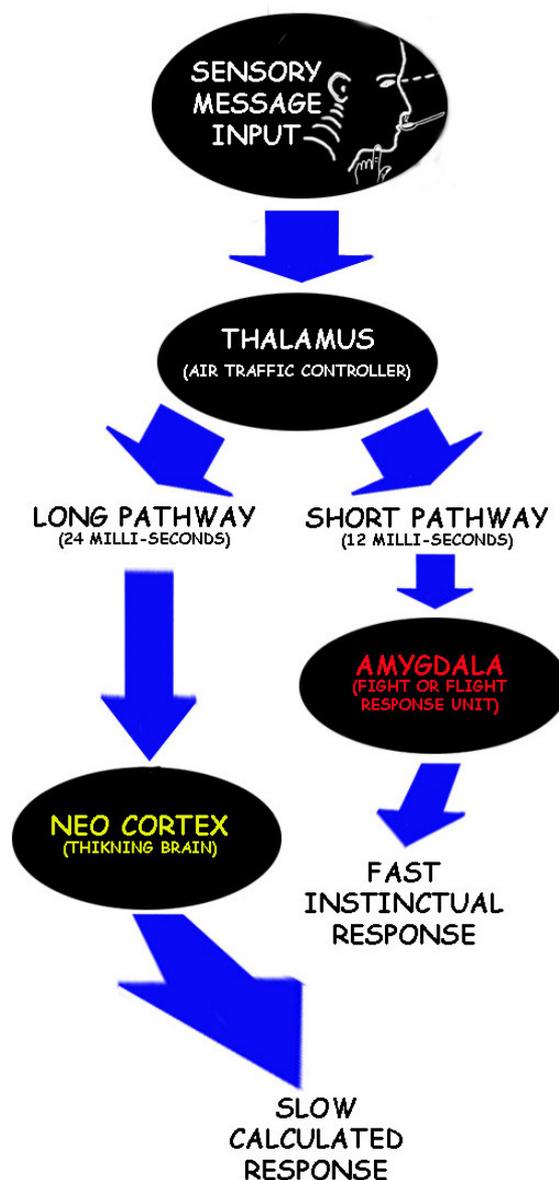
In this diagram, you can see that there are two routes that a sensory message will take: The long pathway and the short pathway.

In the brain the first port of call for sensory input is the thalamus. The thalamus translates sensory messages into the language of the brain and then acts like an air traffic controller, distributing it to the correct parts for processing. The longer route goes to the thinking brain where the message is thought about. The shorter route goes directly to the amygdala in the emotional brain where it can trigger an instant instinctual response.

For example; a man is in a safe, busy shop and hears a nearby gunshot sound, his amygdala quickly respond with fear and cause him to duck down to avoid being shot. This happens whilst his thinking brain is still analysing what the sound could have been; *'hmm...a car misfire, a firework...maybe a gunshot?'* By the time it decides, he could have already been shot because he didn't duck.

So, the upside to the shorter thalamus-amygdala pathway is that it can trigger instant emotion based reactions that can save your life. The downside is that you can feel emotional energy about things you see or hear without thinking about it, so your emotions can seem irrational.

Previously, neurologists thought that the whole message went only to the neocortex. The



neocortex would then decide how to respond; if emotions were necessary in that response, it would send some of the message on to the amygdala, to activate that emotional response. This out of date idea would mean that we would not be capable of acting on our instinctual core emotions without first thinking about them, thus they would not be instinctual and our emergency fight or flight response system would be non-existent.

But, at the Centre for Neural Science at New York University, Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist working with new methods and technologies discovered that there is a shorter neural pathway directly from the thalamus to the amygdala. This shorter thalamus-amygdala pathway means that the amygdala can receive and indeed act on a sensory message whilst the neocortex is still carefully thinking about what to do.

*For your recovery, it's not essential to remember that sensory messages go to the thalamus first, it's just important to remember that sensory messages that pose a threat will trigger physical responses through the amygdala before you even have time to think about how you should respond.*

## **More on The Amygdala**

If you were to surgically remove the amygdala from a person's brain, they would no longer be capable of having feelings. Not only that, it would also not be possible to understand emotions and emotional expressions. Growling, screams, anger, joy, fear, sorrow and every other emotional method of communication would be redundant, it just wouldn't be understood. Tears are triggered by the amygdala. Without the amygdala the personality would be dry and systematic, social awareness would disappear, as would the ability to remember and learn from things that have an emotional attachment. There would therefore be no survival instinct or fight or flight mechanism. Protecting yourself from danger would be difficult because you would not experience any fear in order to warn you that there is any danger.

I read a story about a young man who had his amygdala removed to control seizures. Without his amygdala, he seemed to have lost all recognition of feelings and the ability to have any feelings, but he could still converse. To the despair of his friends and relatives, he was void of emotion when faced with their anguished expressions. He was unable to recognise any close friends or relatives like the face of his aunt or mother, and he preferred to be alone in isolation.

It's interesting that Autism - a condition whereby sufferers show very little emotion - has been linked to low neural activity in the amygdala. At the opposite end of the spectrum people with M.E. have a very high level of neural activity in the amygdala. Their instinctual emotional responses are being pushed to the limits as they're being bombarded with fear warnings.

## **Hijacking of The Amygdala**

The amygdala can react so quickly it cannot only save your life, it can also cause problems because we can end up doing things without thinking.

Dan Goleman, author of '*Emotional Intelligence*' uses the term, '*Hijacking of the amygdala*' to describe when very strong emotional memories are triggered and cause us to do things we might regret.

When a message from the senses triggers a strong emotional memory in the amygdala, electro-chemicals flood the brain and this is when you do things without thinking about them. Things like lashing out in violence, losing your temper, saying things you don't mean or simply

shrieking at the sight of a spider in a quiet library. It takes three to six seconds for these electro-chemicals to clear.

In order to not over react in a hijacked manner by losing your temper or getting overly scared, it is necessary to use another part of the brain, the thinking brain or neocortex, during those three to six seconds. You can do this by simply occupying your thinking brain with non-emotional thought, a puzzle or mathematical problem for example.

This takes neural activity away from the amygdala in the emotional brain and places it in the thinking brain. If the emotional brain is starved of neural activity and input, emotional reactions triggered by the amygdala cannot happen.

Have you ever been told to count to ten when you're angry? This is because maths, analytical thought, learning languages and doing puzzles are all good distractions that require no emotion and so can fully immerse all neural activity in the thinking brain.

In much the same way, distraction is going to play a major role in your recovery and it's going to be important that you find ways of distracting your amygdala from causing irrational emotional responses.

When you have M.E., you must be constantly on the ball and alert in order to direct neural activity away from the amygdala. If you allow the electro-chemicals to continue flooding the brain, the amygdala will continue triggering the emotional responses in your body and you will continue feeling ill. You must interrupt the hijacked state and keep the distraction going until your amygdala can become re-educated and realise that such irrational emotional responses aren't required. This is hard work, but it doesn't have to take that long. The brain is an amazing organ and it's very good at learning new behaviours quickly.

Of course you may be asking how your amygdala got into a hijacked state in the first place...

## The Start of M.E.

Most M.E. sufferers will say that they suddenly '*crashed.*' This could be from a common cold, Glandular fever or an infection. The coincidence of crashing that most sufferers experience with another illness, often leads them to believe that their M.E. could be an ongoing re-occurrence of that illness, whereby their body has run out of energy and is simply unable to recover as usual.

But didn't you notice feelings of unusual tiredness before your big crash? Did your skin become paler? Did you get more spots? Find it harder to concentrate? Feel like you were rushing around and never had enough time? Did your hearing become sensitive or did you get Tinitus long before you got M.E.? Were there any other strange sensitivities creeping into your life unnoticed at the time? Perhaps you experienced some of these symptoms?

They were clues to a gradual decline in your emotional well-being. And it is when we begin to have an unhealthy emotional well-being that the amygdala (which represents our survival instincts) can begin to pick up on things and cause more problems.

Maybe you were working too hard and needed a break, were putting up with something you didn't like, had too much responsibility or were being manipulated or pressured. Perhaps you'd suffered a serious accident or illness and never felt completely reassured that you're safe again. Not giving yourself space to relax, let go and enjoy yourself can also chip away at your well-being.

It has become so normal to suppress emotions in our society that we do not expect to become ill by doing so. So, we just push on regardless of feeling rundown or unhappy. At this stage we find ourselves not only in emotional turmoil, but also suffering unusual physical symptoms because of it. In our weak emotional state we notice the activities, which make us feel unusually tired and give us little odd sensations related to M.E. Though at the time, we do not understand these odd little sensations to be M.E. related.

Our thinking brain, (neocortex based) then starts to relate a wide range of activities, which would normally be no problem to us, as '*harmful.*' Our amygdala then starts to form an emotional memory related to all these activities, which leads us to subconsciously believe that they will all make us ill.

This overwhelming state in itself starts to generate its own emotional memory. We then may feel we are able to cope with very little, most things in fact, and soon this feeling becomes permanent. We begin continually feeling the symptoms of M.E. as the emotional memories associated with those symptoms are continually triggered in the amygdala.

### The Continuation of M.E.

All of the concerns and everyday reminders about M.E. cause the amygdala to trigger your symptoms. The amygdala places you in high alert to ensure your survival through the ordeal. M.E. works the sufferer's survival instincts so hard in fact, that sometimes having M.E. can make you feel as though every day actually is a fight for survival.

M.E. based emotional memories generated by the amygdala therefore create a catch twenty-two situation whereby the amygdala is responding to the symptoms it's creating. As a result, the M.E. once established can go on for a long time.

**Take a look at the following example:**

A man is at home in his living room. There is a loud ‘*crash*’ sound from the kitchen next door. The ‘*crash*’ sound travels through the air to the man’s ear, where it enters into his brain as an auditory sensory message.

The thalamus translates the sensory message into the language of the brain. It then dispatches the message via two separate pathways to the relevant parts of the brain for processing. The short pathway goes directly to the amygdala in the limbic system or ‘*emotional brain,*’ the other longer pathway goes to the neocortex or ‘*thinking brain.*’ The amygdala receive the message in half the time it takes the neocortex to receive it.

The crash sound message triggers an emotional response in the amygdala based on other crash sounds the amygdala has memories of. The man instantly feels this emotion and his body goes into a mild state of alert.

Just moments later the neocortex is ready to step in with an opinion of what the crash sound was and how the man should react. But, the thinking brain is unsure of what the crash sound was. It could have been something falling off the draining board, but it could also have been a burglar breaking and entering.

As the neocortex has not been able to satisfy the amygdala with a calming answer as to what the crash sound was, the amygdala moves the body onto the next stage of alert. The man’s hearing becomes sharper as his attention focuses on identifying the sound. His heart rate increases and blood travels to his muscles in case he must fight.

The sound happens again. He considers going to have a look, but feels unsure... ‘*what if the burglar’s armed?*’ thinks his neocortex.

With that thought, his amygdala step him up to the next level of alert. A surge of anxiety races through him and he feels goose pimples all over.

The man’s neocortex butts in and overrides the feelings caused by the amygdala, as he remembers he had left two wine glasses precariously poised on the draining board. His amygdala respond to this thought and let him relax a bit. His heart slows a little, but he still feels nervous as he goes to take a look in the kitchen.

In the kitchen, he sees that there are indeed two smashed wine glasses on the floor. The man immediately calms down and feels relaxed as his neocortex and amygdala both agree on the source of the sound; and that there is no danger.

**Now, let’s replace the ‘*crash*’ sound with a strange sensation associated with M.E. and let’s say the man, called Joe, is a person who is about to get full blown M.E.**

Joe is generally a helpful man who would do anything for anybody. He has led the same kind of life as anyone else, had his fair share of problems and difficulties, which he generally doesn’t like to off load onto others, because he doesn’t like to burden other people. He has had a lot on his mind lately, to do with family and work responsibilities and has been finding life increasingly difficult. Joe looks tired and often gets little headaches, lately he has developed Tinnitus, but he doesn’t notice these small changes in health creeping in on him, as he has much more important things to worry about.

Joe is walking home after a long hard day at work. He feels a little odd, as if he’s ‘walking on rubber,’ and his legs are little numb. He also feels unusually tired. He thinks that there is perhaps something wrong with him and starts to feel that his everyday activities are now becoming too much.

He gets home and the odd sensations subside a little. He goes to bed early so that he can get a good rest for work the next day.

Joe wakes up the next day and goes to work. He struggles to manage at work because he feels so tired. But, he does manage and walks home at 6pm. Again he gets the odd sensations of walking on rubber and a lack of feeling in his legs. This is a bit worrying for Joe. As he walks home, he thinks, *'What on earth is wrong with me? Why do I have numb legs?'*

Joe's amygdala picks up on his worry and triggers emotional responses associated with fear and anxiety. In Joe's weak state, these emotional responses physically feel quite powerful and cause Joe's legs to go even number, so numb that he must sit down on the curb because he just can't walk anymore.

This makes Joe feel scared that there really is something terribly wrong with him. Again his amygdala triggers the emotional response for fear and his legs carry on being numb. As the ground beneath him seems to sway, he feels like he is on a boat too.

Joe's strange sensations continue as he carries on thinking about what on earth could be causing them. His amygdala responds to his thoughts and fear, and so the cycle continues. He considers going to hospital, but then calls his wife to pick him up.

The next day Joe goes to the doctor. The doctor tells him that there is nothing obviously wrong with him, but he'll put him in for some tests.

Joe goes back to work and struggles on for a day or so, but soon finds he is simply unable to stand up anymore. He goes to see the doctor again, who says he is still unsure, but suggests *'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.'* On hearing *'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome,'* Joe worries as he once had a friend with that condition. He suddenly feels very alone, as he knows CFS is a bad condition to have.

His neocortex cannot come up with an answer to calm his amygdala, the doctor has no answer and all Joe knows is that CFS is a terrible condition to have. Joe's worrying thoughts persistently trigger fear and anxiety in him, and he has to adjust his life because of his symptoms. Thus, Joe's cycle of M.E. thinking and negative triggered emotions establishes its-self, and he becomes stuck in a loop.

If it had been caught in time, Joe would have realised that he must take a holiday or resolve whatever the problem was that was causing him to feel tired and unwell. But, he stuck with the situation that was making him feel unwell, and with the growing subconscious awareness and conscious worries of tiredness and strange sensations, he developed M.E.

People find horror films enjoyable because they can escalate the watcher into a mild state of alert. It's just enough to get the adrenalin pumping and set the heart beating a little faster; a state similar to how the man would have felt on hearing that initial 'crash' sound in the kitchen. A film can take us to the edge of fear without causing us any major distress, and that's exciting. It can do this because a voice in the back of our mind tells us the things in the film aren't real. With M.E., the voice in the back of your mind plays an opposite role by saying, *'I don't understand this, so yes, be scared and worry about it.'* So there is nothing to stop you escalating into a greater state of alert.

## **What's in a Name**

A major problem with M.E. is that it has such a bad press. It's viewed as a very severe illness with no proper cure that can go on for years and re-occur. This of course, makes people scared of it and so if you are unlucky enough to get it, that fear created by the bad image actually contributes to the illness by panicking the amygdala. It becomes as another thought to mull over in your mind and worry about, it gets blown out of proportion because the term *'M.E.'* can sound so daunting. Just keep in mind that the general population's opinion about M.E. is not correct.

There is so much mystery surrounding it for a reason, because many doctors (through no fault of their own) do not know what causes it. Now that you do know however, you can disregard

all those other ideas about M.E., forget worrying about whether or not you have high or low blood pressure, muscle wastage and who knows what else, because you don't have those problems. All those problems have come from the amygdala overreacting. That is the only problem you have and all those other problems will vanish once you correct the amygdala.

Some people worry that '*M.E.*' is just an umbrella term used for many things that the doctors cannot fathom out. I would tend to agree with this suggestion and personally I see it as a reassurance that there is no need to worry about M.E. symptoms. If the doctors can't fathom them out with all the amazing tests that can be done these days, then it helps demonstrate that there is no physical need for the symptoms to exist, just an emotional one due to an overworked amygdala and an overwhelming amount of unreleased emotional energy.

When you get M.E., in order to be diagnosed it seems you have to be tested for everything, you get a real good going over! I feel safe that in this day and age we can generally rely on what the doctors tell us when they say they can find nothing wrong...so why carry on looking for something wrong?

The thing to remember with M.E. is that strange things do happen in the body and this is because the body isn't working properly because it is stressed, it's in a state of dis-ease, that's the only reason. So there's no need to get wrapped up in one of the pains or sensations you may be experiencing. You may feel as though your chest is very painful or you may feel something that feels very threatening to your health, but don't focus on it, don't let it capture your fear and panic you further. Take a step back from your symptom, remain calm and do as I describe in chapter three, '*The Stop Method.*'

# The Hippocampus and Memory

As well as the amygdala, the limbic system or emotional brain also includes the hippocampus. The hippocampus lays down memories related to emotion. We can all see how emotion and memory are very closely related. When you go to a party and meet new people, who do you remember most the next day? It will be the people that had an emotional impact on you, that man who made you angry, that man who made you laugh or that woman who made you smile and feel embarrassed. It is therefore not surprising that a part of the emotional brain is responsible for memory.

**There are three types of memory:**

- 1. Working memory** which enables you to remember the last sentence of a conversation or perform mathematics in your head. This memory is like the RAM of a computer and does not link to emotion, so is not related to the Hippocampus.
- 2. Procedural memory** which enables you to remember how to play an instrument, solve a puzzle, play badminton and perform other skills and habits that are learned through repetition. The hippocampus is not involved with this either.
- 3.** And finally there's **declarative memory** which is involved with the hippocampus. Declarative memory is our capacity to recall everyday facts, names, figures and events. Although it is not known where all the declarative memories are stored, the hippocampus is where the amygdala pulls them from.

The amygdala can learn because it has access to these memories. This means we can learn and remember that fire is dangerous, that our mother is a sweet lady or that jumping off the edge of a cliff is fatal.

The amygdala associates each memory with an emotion. So when we look down off a cliff edge and sense fear or a lurch in our stomach, this is the amygdala telling us that to jump off it would be fatal. When we see the face of our sweet mother, the amygdala accesses the hippocampus to get the memory of who she is and then triggers a feeling of love. This feeling tells us our mother is a sweet lady and that she's important to us.

Emotional memories also create more general bodily responses that we do subconsciously. So we smile at our sweet mother and we blush when we see that person we have a crush on. The hippocampus holds a memory of those two people and the amygdala holds the memory of the emotion that goes with them and so we get the physical response of smiling and blushing.

This is how the relationship of emotion and memory works and it's how we learn to protect ourselves. When a boy curiously puts his finger in his pet mouse's mouth, the hippocampus helps record the image of the mouse and the amygdala stores the memory of how much it hurt when the boy's finger got bitten. Then the next time he goes to put his finger in the mouse's mouth, his amygdala recall the mouse's image from the hippocampus, makes the emotional association and triggers fear so that the boy does not make the same mistake again.

*'If the amygdala is **FEAR**, then the hippocampus is **MEMORY**.'*

In the case of someone who has M.E., their amygdala has learned to trigger some very over the top emotional responses when recalling a memory through the hippocampus.

Let's call our M.E. sufferer Joe again. So for example, Joe steps out of his front door and looks down to the end of his street. His amygdala recall the image of the street from his hippocampus and link that image with the last emotion Joe felt on that street. It was fear because Joe has M.E. and he could hardly manage to walk home the last time he went out. So his amygdala trigger fear again as this is the emotional response they've linked with the street. This not only stops Joe from walking down the street because he feels scared by it, it also stops him walking down the street because he is physically incapable due to the strong sensations of fear that literally render him too weak.

Joe's amygdala is only doing its' job of course, it's protecting him from walking down the street. The only problem is that Joe doesn't need to be protected from walking down the street because the only thing that hurts him when he does so is the fear triggered by his amygdala. So in order to get out of this tricky situation, Joe must make a new emotional memory for his amygdala to associate with the street. It is such new emotional memories that you need to create in order to re-educate the amygdala.

# Emotional Memories

## Creating New Emotional Memories

The best way to make a new emotional memory is to use emotion because you remember things most because of how they made you feel. So you're not likely to remember meeting an emotionless bus driver, but you are likely to remember a bus driver that smiled at you and was very jolly. This is why I've emphasised so frequently the importance of generating positive emotional energy in order to dissolve the M.E. memories.

So to go back to our example with Joe, in order for him to strengthen the making of his new emotional memory, he could quietly sing to himself as he walks down the street or listen to a song he likes on his walk-man. Doing this will also help Joe generate good feelings and raise his confidence that he's able to walk because music can be very uplifting and encouraging. This will also make the walk more memorable and his amygdala will be more likely to refer to this happy memory the next time Joe goes for a walk. I used to listen to my favourite album when I was building up my walking distance, it was a very positive album with positive lyrics and it helped me to gear my mind away from M.E. and remain focused on enjoying the walk. Incidentally, it was a Badly Drawn Boy album.

## Fun – The Important Ingredient

In order to bring your confidence and emotional well-being back up to a healthy level you need to do distracting activities that you enjoy doing and that will give you confidence. The more fun you have, the stronger the memories will be and the easier it will be to ignore and override M.E. This is very important - think about it. Your body is at the end of its tether because it has been bogged down with negative emotional energy created by M.E. and negative thought patterns. Your body needs to feel alive again and cared for. It needs to know that you are going to start listening to and acting on your emotional sensations. Your body needs to stop feeling pushed into doing things it doesn't emotionally feel like doing. It is like a spoilt child that can't take any more pushing and wants to have things their way now, they don't want to listen to '*You should do this or that,*' it just wants to be happy and put it's feelings first from now on.

The thing about emotions is that they can be very subtle or very obvious. You know when you're in a stinking mood for example, but you don't always notice when you feel a little stressed...or a little relaxed and happy. Now though, you should try tuning into your emotions more and notice the little things in life that do make you feel good. Stop looking for big answers to your M.E. and start listening to and acting on your emotions. You can take a drug for a problem and you know you've taken it, the effects can be quite obvious...and the side effects sometime! But when you're acting to resolve an issue like M.E. yourself, you should allow yourself to become more sensitive to the changes in your body. If something makes you feel good, don't ignore it, allow yourself to explore that thing. Don't think to yourself '*oh that's a waste of time, how can doing an hour or two of this activity that I really enjoy help me?*' Well, of course it can help you, it will make you feel better and as M.E. is stemming from an unhealthy emotional well-being, anything relaxing or enjoyable is going to help and it will help permanently the more you do enjoy yourself, because

each time your body will learn that you care about your emotions and are no longer going to override them with your thinking brain.

So, going back to fun and making sure you listen to your emotions, here is a relevant story about when I started to listen to my emotional energy when riding my bike...

## The Selfish Inner Child

I hadn't ridden my bike for six months due to having M.E. I didn't feel that I would be able to balance and I felt that it would exhaust me and make my weak feeling heart race too much. One sunny day however, my housemate was home and so I decided to give it a try with him there. I managed to ride my bike fifteen metres down to the end of the street and back and it felt fantastic, I had no symptoms whilst riding and I loved it. The moment I slowed down to stop however, my M.E. symptoms came back and I felt too weak to carry on. So I gave my bike to my housemate and went in and lay down for a while. It annoyed me that I had enjoyed riding the bike so much but still my symptoms had stopped me from continuing. At the time I had been going to Reverse Therapy (RT) sessions (of which I had three). MY RT therapist pointed out to me that my body would have been happy whilst riding the bike and that was why I'd felt no symptoms. It was when my 'headmind' stepped in and started worrying, that I felt symptoms return. So this helped me realise what I had done wrong and why my symptoms had stopped me.

Basically, whilst I had been riding the bike, my mind had been focused on enjoying myself. I had not been allowing my M.E. thoughts to say to me *'Don't do this, you're going to fall off or make yourself weak and tired.'* Instead I'd been focused on the great feelings of excitement I was getting from actually being able to ride the bike after six months! My mind had been empty of thought and was one with my body, doing what felt good for my body – the cycling.

When I slowed down to stop however, I started thinking about whether I dare ride up and down the street again. My rationalising thinking brain jumped in with its M.E. thoughts like *'I haven't cycled for so long, maybe it will be too much,'* and ruined it...bang, my amygdala picked up on my concern, sensed a threat and triggered my M.E. symptoms to stop me from doing anymore in case I hurt myself. Then I started worrying because I was feeling symptoms, which again caused my amygdala to panic and trigger more symptoms and again...bang, before I knew it I felt too weak to try cycling again and had to go in.

The time it takes to have an M.E. thought is next to nothing and the problem with them is that they come without your permission. You don't think about whether or not you're going to worry that riding the bike will exhaust you, you just think it, the worrying thought pops into your head naturally because it's natural to worry about your health when you're ill. The amygdala then reacts to the worrying thoughts and instantly triggers a symptom. The amygdala also subconsciously reacts to emotional memories it's pulled from previous M.E. experiences and so again creates trouble as it sees you are outside and can panic because you might not be able to make it back to the house. (Though of course you can make it back to the house if the amygdala doesn't panic and trigger symptoms!)

So with all that in mind, the next time I attempted to ride my bike I was much more successful. I treated myself like a spoilt child who must get their way and I used ***'The Stop Method,'*** (which I will explain soon) in order to stop my amygdala from panicking. Basically I cleared my mind and focused on how my body felt. I cycled down to the end of the street and asked myself if I wanted to carry on to the next street. If my gut reaction was one of fear, then I didn't continue further, if my gut reaction was still happy excitement however, I would continue onto the next street. I rode around near my house like this carefully listening to my gut reactions about

which road I should turn down and how far I could cycle from my house. I imagined that my emotional well-being was represented by a child sat on my crossbar, my inner child if you like and they had grown selfish because they was fed up of being ignored, fed up of me not listening to my emotions. This child's wishes were represented in my gut feelings and I had to adhere to every one in order to recover and get my emotional well-being to trust me again.

So don't push or pressure yourself with responsibilities no matter how big or small they are. Be selfish and become addicted to making yourself happy. It's most likely that you've got M.E. through spreading yourself too thinly and looking out for others more than yourself, now it's time to turn the tables and let your body know that you want it to have fun and you care that it's happy. Take up new things that you enjoy, dance round the house, most bodies love to dance, go for walks, ride a bike, go for a swim, whatever your body will enjoy.

*Keep your body and mind satisfied.  
Exercise more, enjoy more,  
never forget that life is short,  
break the rules, forgive quickly,  
laugh uncontrollably, love truly and  
be kind to yourself. - Unknown*

It may be that you have responsibilities in your life such as children or loved ones, and it may be your duty to care for them. But through your recovery period you must be selfish and concentrate on yourself. Explain this to people and make them understand that if you get yourself well first, you will be a much better person for them too. What we so often do with M.E. is reserve our energy so that we can at least get the main jobs done. Forget that, let someone else do the main jobs, you need to be free to do what you want. In the long run you will end up not being selfish as you will be of more help to those around you if you are M.E. free. So it's in everybody's best interest. Give yourself time whereby you just concentrate on doing things for your own development and self confidence.

## **How Emotional Memories Work**

When an emotional memory is triggered it is always felt in the present, as if happening now. Unlike thinking brain (neocortex) based memories, an emotional memory has no correct details attached and cannot inform you what time or where you had previously felt an emotion. This is why emotions can seem irrational at times.

If a person has had a bad experience or shock, the emotional memory of that will be stored at the top of the pile in their amygdala, in case it's urgently needed. This is what can cause a person to become nervous and jumpy as a strong emotional memory can then be triggered unnecessarily. For you, emotional memories regarding M.E. are at the top of your pile whilst all of the memories of being able to for e.g. walk down the street or deal with life easily are stuck somewhere at the bottom, long forgotten by your amygdala. It is these forgotten memories that you must revive.

If we go back to the example of the man in the shop who heard a gunshot sound and ducked, perhaps he ducked because his instincts have learned that gunfire sounds are a threat to his survival, because he once fought in a war. The body can even display the same physical reactions that were felt when the memory was created. I imagine in the war his stomach may have knotted up, his palms grown clammy and heart rate quickened. These sensations might also occur when he ducked in the shop.

But, when the man's thinking brain established that there is no danger, because the war is over, his thinking brain would send signals to his amygdala to relax. He would stand up a little embarrassed and shaky, whilst slowly his pulse normalised and his stomach settled. The people in the shop would giggle at him, because actually, the gunshot sound was just kids outside, with firecrackers.

It is likely that some people in the shop initially jumped too when they heard the firecrackers. But, as they have never experienced real gunfire situations, emotional memories of the sound simply trigger a small response from their amygdala, based only on past firecracker or car misfiring sounds.

The key element to notice in this example is that the man's thinking brain or neocortex did manage to stop the amygdala from triggering the emotions of fear. He may have been scared of the firecrackers at first and he may have literally 'frozen with fear,' but the thinking part of his brain helped him overcome that fear by making him realise he was safe. You can conquer M.E. in the same way, with your thinking brain.

When you try to walk too far or do anything that is limited by your M.E., an M.E. based emotional memory is triggered in the amygdala, so that you don't go beyond your limits. It's often fear, and you feel this fear as a symptom or as the worsening of a symptom. This fear stops you from doing what you want to. This is how survival instincts work. Throughout your illness, your amygdala in the emotional brain has been running the show, now it's up to your neocortex based thinking brain to resolve the problem.

Fear is a strong emotion to override and deal with and it can make us unable to move, freezing us to the spot. With this in mind, think of how other emotional energy can affect us.

- Catatonia brought on by emotional stress can leave a person rigid and unresponsive to outside stimuli
- Stuttering and an inability to get words out can also occur in times of severe emotional upset or trauma
- Even giggling fits brought on by things immensely funny, show that emotional happiness can physically incapacitate us (as we can't stop laughing) in some way.

