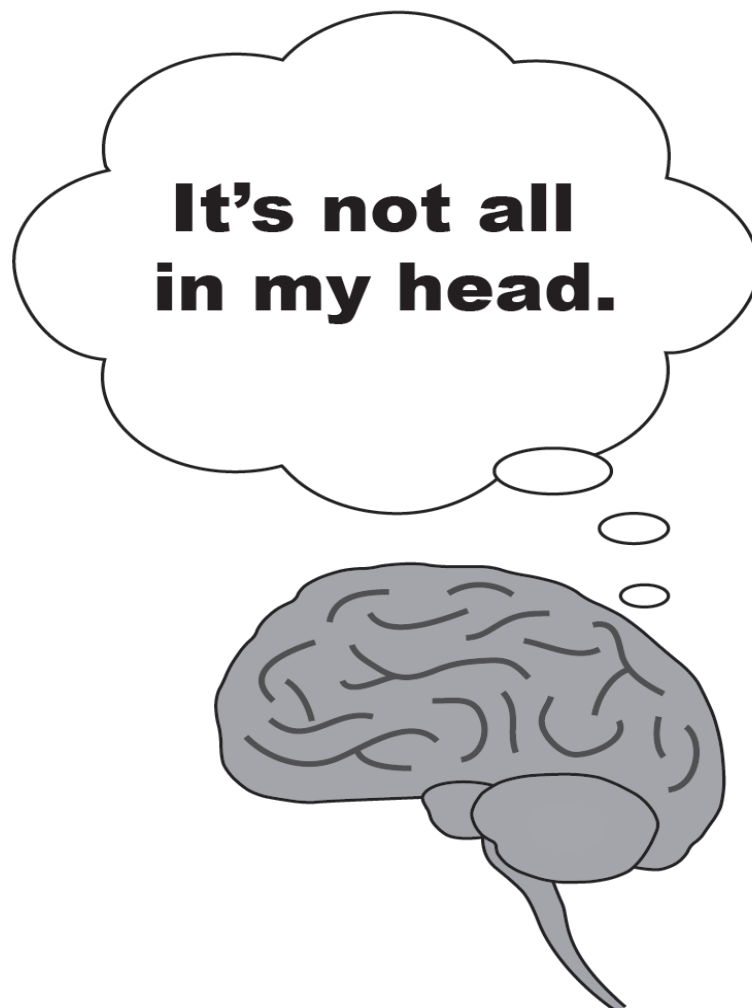


FUNCTIONAL NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER:

The Diagnosis and Your Referral to Psychology



NHS Fife Clinical Health Psychology

Functional Neurological Disorder (FND): The Diagnosis and Your Referral to Psychology

This booklet will –

- Explain functional neurological problems.
- Describe some of the common symptoms and experiences.
- Explain why being referred to a psychologist can be helpful.
- Explain what will happen if you see a psychologist.

Why have I been given this booklet?

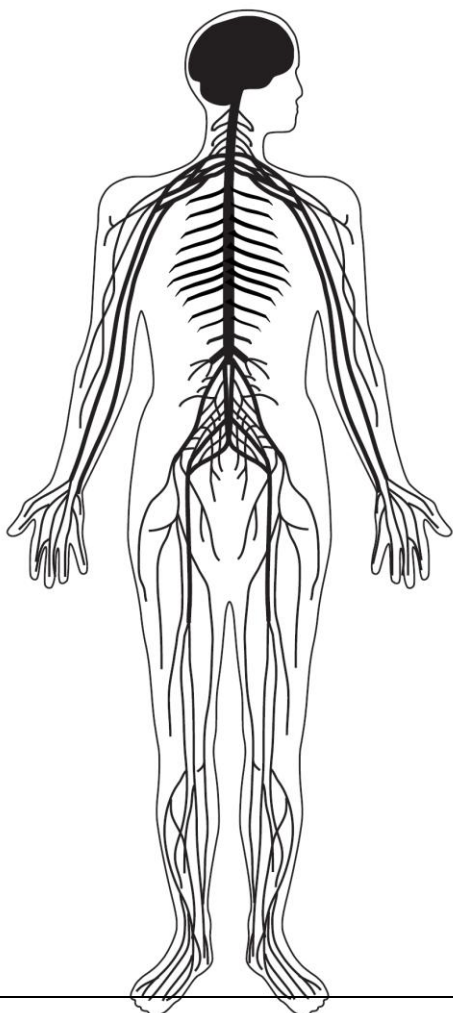
In most cases, you will have had a neurological assessment before receiving the diagnosis of FND. For some people, this process will have been complicated. It may also have taken a long time. Receiving this diagnosis can lead to many different feelings. Some people may feel relieved that they finally have an answer. Some people may feel scared or confused. There is no right or wrong way to feel about a diagnosis of FND.

Your Neurologist will have discussed a referral to psychology with you. They think that a referral to psychology might be helpful as the symptoms are affecting your emotional wellbeing and quality of life. You may be having difficulty managing the physical symptoms while getting on with day-to-day tasks. This leaflet helps explain why you have received the diagnosis, and how psychology can help.

What are Functional Neurological Problems?

Functional Neurological Disorder is a diagnosis that has **real physical symptoms** affecting your everyday life. Functional neurological problems cover a range of symptoms but commonly these include:

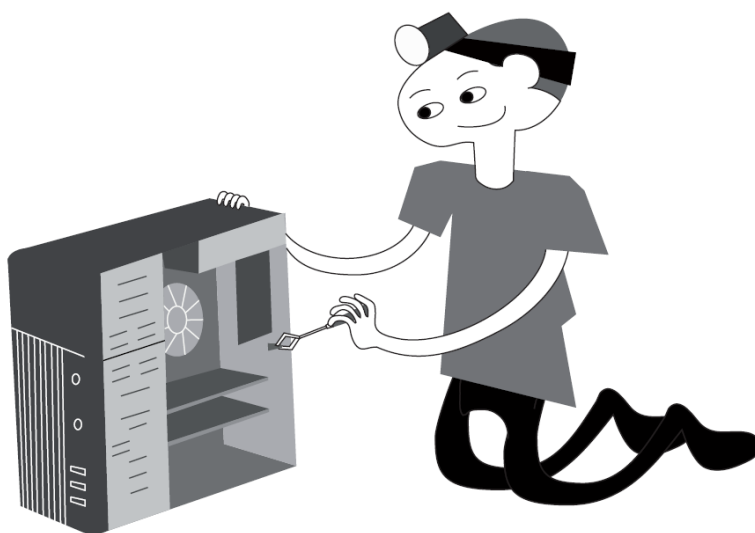
- Difficulty with walking or balance
- Problems controlling and moving limbs
- Experiencing odd or unpleasant sensations such as numbness, tingling, or pain
- A sense of losing control of your body
- Memory problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- At times people may 'blackout' and feel out of touch with what is going on around them. This can be experienced as fits, seizures, or a brief loss of awareness.



You may experience some or all of these symptoms, and you are not alone. Around **a third of people who attend neurology appointments** have a functional neurological problem. They are called 'functional' because the problem is not located in the biology of the nervous system. Instead, the problem shows up in the function of the body. The body is not working as we would expect it to.

Why did this not show up in neurological testing?

The nervous system is a complex network of nerves and cells that carry messages between the brain and parts of your body. Neurological tests check that all parts of this system are healthy and in good working order. It is like an electrical engineer checking over a computer. They will look at the wires and circuits to see if they are in good physical condition.



Your tests will have indicated that your nervous system is healthy. All the parts are there and in good condition. The problem is in the way the system is working. This is like a computer having a software problem:-

- ❖ The computer itself is in good condition, but the software that it is using is having a problem and not working as it should.

Your Neurologist will have done tests to rule out a problem with the condition of your nervous system. They will also have looked for clear indications that you have a functional (software) problem.

When nothing unusual is identified through testing, some people worry they are not being believed. They may fear people think they are making up their symptoms. THIS IS NOT THE CASE! This is a real problem; you are not making it up.

What may have caused this?

Functional problems are often complex. They occur for different reasons in different people. There can be something that triggers the symptoms. For example:

- A physical injury
- Pain (especially severe neck or back pain)
- High levels of anxiety, such as panic attacks (some people can experience a 'spaced out' feeling called dissociation at the start of symptoms)
- An illness that caused a lot of fatigue and bed rest
- Waking up from general anaesthetic
- A migraine attack
- An emotional event / trauma / complicated grief

For others there may be a build up of circumstances over time. For many there will be no particular reason why these symptoms have developed. This lack of a specific answer can cause feelings of confusion, anger, and anxiety.

Other Symptoms

When you have a diagnosis of FND you may experience other symptoms alongside your functional problems. These can include –

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Poor concentration
- Low Mood
- Worry
- Anger and frustration
- Lack of enjoyment in life
- Problems with sleep

These other symptoms can make your day-to-day life harder. They may change how you are living and reduce your enjoyment of life.

Why have I been referred to psychology?

Your brain is like a computer and it uses software programmes to help you do your daily tasks. We all have a number of software 'programmes' that are each in charge of things like -

- ❖ Moving our muscles and limbs
- ❖ Storing and recalling memories
- ❖ Producing thoughts
- ❖ Generating emotions



All these programmes need to work together effectively. Sometimes there may be a communication problem between the programmes and they do not work smoothly. When this happens, functional problems can occur.

A psychologist is like a software engineer. They will work with you to identify what is going on in the programmes, and help you get them working more smoothly. This can help to improve your quality of life.

What can I expect from the Psychology Service?



The Assessment Appointment

Your first appointment will be an assessment session with a psychologist. You can bring someone along to the assessment if you think this will be helpful for you. At this appointment, the psychologist will ask questions aiming to help you both understand your problems. These appointments usually last for 1 hour.

- You will have the opportunity to ask questions and explore how psychology may help you.
- You will have the choice to go ahead with help from psychology, or to be discharged if it is not right for you.
- If it is agreed that a psychological approach may be helpful you will go onto a waiting list for treatment.

What questions might the Psychologist ask?

- ❖ How have you coped with your symptoms so far?
- ❖ How did you get your diagnosis?
- ❖ What are your thoughts and feelings about your symptoms?
- ❖ How has it affected you, your family, and your friendships?
- ❖ What would you like to be different about your life?

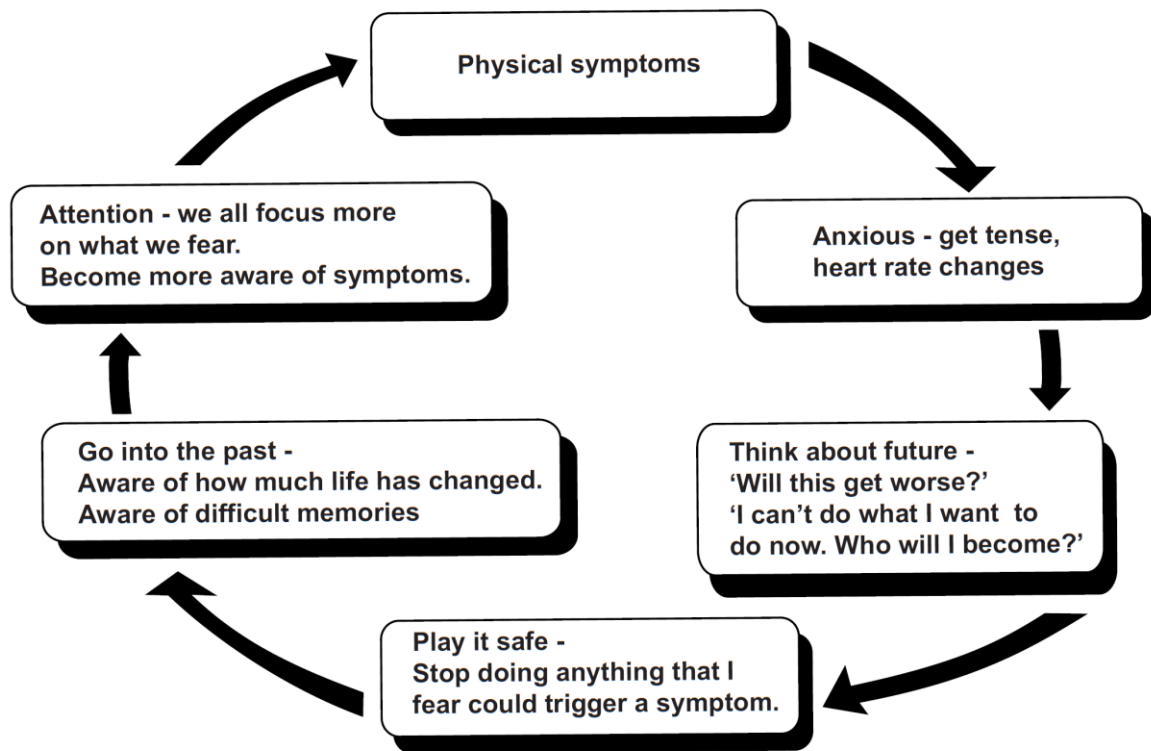
The Psychology Treatment Appointments

You will generally meet fortnightly with your psychologist at a local hospital or community venue. Sessions normally last between 45-60 minutes but can be shortened to suit you. We offer up to 6 sessions of psychological therapy within the Clinical Health Psychology service.

- Together with your psychologist, you will set realistic and personally important goals for treatment.
- Treatment will involve the introduction of skills to help you improve your quality of life, despite having your symptoms.
- The aim is for you to feel better about living your life alongside any physical symptoms.
- Treatment will involve learning new skills that will require practise.

How could developing skills change things for me?

Most people are not aware that there is a strong link between our mind (psychology) and our body (physical). Many of the symptoms described in this leaflet have a strong physical component. Physical changes can be the start of a vicious cycle that can affect our quality of life –



The cycle shows how the way we think about, feel about, and respond to functional symptoms can have a big impact on our lives.

During treatment a psychologist will work with you to:

1. Develop an awareness and understanding of any unhelpful cycles for you.
2. Build ways of coping with symptoms by introducing new skills to use at various points in your own cycle.

What can I do while I am waiting for my Psychology Appointment?

Information on emotions, physical health problems, and useful coping strategies can be found at -

www.moodcafe.co.uk

Through this website you can also book yourself onto a local “Step on Stress” classes that provides information on stress and techniques for managing it.

Further information on functional neurological disorders and non-epileptic seizures can be found at –

www.neurosymptoms.org

www.nonepilepticattackdisorder.org.uk

www.fndhope.org



If you require this information in other community languages or alternative formats please contact the Equality and Diversity Lead by email angelaheyes@nhs.net or by telephoning 01592 226783.

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