

Cystic Fibrosis in the Workplace



What is Cystic Fibrosis (CF)?

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is one of the most common genetic diseases affecting people in Australia. It causes a build-up of mucus which primarily affects the lungs and digestive system; however, everyone is different and may experience other symptoms along with varying degrees of severity.

How Do You Get Cystic Fibrosis?

Approximately 1 in 25 people are carriers of the CF gene. Both parents need to carry the gene to have a child with CF. Most people with CF are now diagnosed at birth through the Guthrie test.

Common Symptoms

- Persistent coughing which is not contagious
- Recurrent lung and sinus infections
- Wheezing or shortness of breath

Management of CF

Most CF management occurs outside of the workplace; however, hospital appointments and admissions may be required at times to maintain optimal health. Some ways that people with CF manage their health include:

- **Daily airway clearance:** Daily physiotherapy is required to keep the lungs clear and prevent permanent damage.
- **Nutrition:** People with CF generally require a lot more calories and salt in their diet. Enzymes are also required for approximately 85% of people with CF to assist in the digestion of food.
- **Medications:** Common medications include enzymes, mucus thinning medications, antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, salt, vitamins and more. Medications may be taken orally, inhaled via a nebuliser or other inhaler device or given intravenously.
- **Exercise:** Improves lung function, strength, fitness levels and mood.

Infection Prevention

For people with CF, some bacteria and viruses can cause major lung infections, resulting in hospital admissions and permanent lung damage. Part of everyday life for a person with CF involves reducing the risk of catching an infection, through good hand hygiene practices and avoiding people who are unwell.

How Can We Support People with CF in the Workplace?

People with CF usually look and seem the same as everyone else despite managing a chronic health condition. The symptoms listed above are most common to people with CF, however not all people experience these symptoms, or they may have slightly different symptoms and needs.

It's important to provide a space to have open, honest communication as these needs can change over time.

Cystic Fibrosis WA are available to provide workplace education on CF. For more information get in touch with our team at education@cfwa.org.au or on **08 6457 7333**.