

PATIENTS, FAMILY & CLINICIANS

How to explain FND (without making it worse)

The way FND is explained often shapes fear, trust and recovery. This sheet is for patients to re-read, and for clinicians and families looking for careful language.

A short explanation many people find useful

“FND is a problem with how the nervous system is functioning — how the brain and body send signals — rather than damage we can always see on a scan. Your symptoms are real. They are not imaginary and not your fault. With the right understanding and plan, many people can improve.”

Language tips

Prefer

- “Your symptoms are real”
- “Functional means a software problem, not ‘fake’”
- “Scans looking normal can still fit FND”
- “We have a plan for rehab and safety-netting”
- “Fluctuation is common in FND”

Avoid if possible

- “There’s nothing wrong with you”
- “It’s just stress / anxiety” (alone)
- “You need to try harder / ignore it”
- “Medically unexplained” as the whole story
- Debating the person in front of others

For family and friends

Belief matters. Help with practical tasks on bad days, protect rest after flares, and avoid pressuring someone to “prove” symptoms. Ask what support they want rather than taking over completely.

Safety first

Call 999 for a suspected stroke, first seizure, severe breathing difficulty or other medical emergency. For urgent concerns that are not an emergency, contact NHS 111 where available or your local urgent-care service. Do not assume new or different symptoms are FND.

Continue overleaf for practical next steps, a personal plan and sources →

HOW TO EXPLAIN FND · NEXT STEPS

Explain the positive evidence

A helpful explanation connects the diagnosis to the person's own symptoms and examination. A clinician can explain what a positive sign means and its limits. 'Your scan is normal' alone does not explain FND, and an analogy should not suggest the whole brain is broken or every symptom is harmless.

Check what the person has understood

Invite questions without testing or blaming: 'What does this explanation mean to you?' Ask which part feels unclear or difficult to accept. Offer a written summary and a chance to revisit it. Do not assume that mentioning psychology is enough to explain either the condition or the treatment plan.

Words for everyday conversations

You could say: 'I have a neurological condition that affects how my body works. My symptoms vary, and I may need extra time or a break.' You can keep medical details private. Describe the help you need now, rather than feeling you must persuade everyone or recount your entire medical history.

My next steps — discuss with your care team

My own short explanation

One practical thing I want others to understand

Sources and further reading

- NHS: understanding an FND diagnosis
www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk/display-pil/pil-fnd-understanding-the-diagnosis-8013
- NHS: understanding functional neurological symptoms
www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/functional-neurological-symptoms/

More practical help: What is FND? leaflet · For GPs hub · Start here