

Functional Neurological Disorder:

Core Concepts

Functional Neurological Disorder involves real neurological symptoms that affect how the brain and nervous system function. While FND is often misunderstood, there are core concepts that help explain the condition clearly, accurately, and without blame.

This page provides concise reference information for people living with FND, caregivers and families, educators, healthcare professionals, and others seeking foundational clarity.

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How “Functional” Is Defined in FND

In Functional Neurological Disorder, the word *functional* refers to **how the nervous system is working**, not whether symptoms are real or serious.

In FND:

- Brain structure is typically intact
- Signaling, regulation, or processing is disrupted
- Symptoms arise from altered nervous system function, not damage

Functional does **not** mean imagined, exaggerated, psychological, or voluntary.

Symptoms Are Real and Involuntary

Symptoms of FND are genuine and experienced outside of conscious control.

Common features include:

- Movement difficulties
- Sensory changes
- Seizure-like episodes
- Speech or cognitive changes
- Fatigue and pain

People with FND are not choosing symptoms, causing them intentionally, or able to simply stop them.

The Brain–Body Communication Model

FND is often described as a problem with **brain–body communication**.

This means:

- Signals may be sent inaccurately, delayed, or misinterpreted
- Automatic processes become disrupted
- The nervous system may remain in a heightened or dysregulated state

This model helps explain why symptoms can fluctuate and why rest, pacing, and regulation matter.

FND Is Diagnosed Positively

FND is not only a diagnosis of exclusion.

Clinicians use:

- Recognized neurological signs
- Symptom patterns
- Clinical examination findings

A proper diagnosis focuses on **what is present**, not just what is ruled out.

Stress Is Not the Same as Cause

Stress can influence symptoms, but it is **not the same as cause**.

Important distinctions:

- Not all people with FND have trauma histories
- Symptoms are not explained by stress alone
- Emotional factors may interact with nervous system regulation, but do not invalidate symptoms

Oversimplifying FND as “stress-based” is inaccurate and harmful.

Recovery and Management Are Individual

There is no single pathway for improvement.

Management may involve:

- Neurological care
- Physiotherapy or occupational therapy
- Psychological support when appropriate
- Education, pacing, and nervous system regulation

Progress is often non-linear and highly individual.

Building Understanding With Accuracy and Respect

Understanding the core concepts of Functional Neurological Disorder helps reduce stigma, improve communication, and support safer, more respectful care. Healing Horizons for FND is committed to providing information that reflects current clinical understanding while honoring lived experience and individual dignity.