



# Fibromyalgia

## Overview

Fibromyalgia is a long-term condition that involves widespread body pain. The pain happens along with fatigue. It also can involve issues with sleep, memory and mood. Researchers think that fibromyalgia affects the way the brain and spinal cord process painful and nonpainful signals. That increases your overall sensitivity to pain.

Symptoms often start after a triggering event. Triggers can include injuries, surgery, infections or emotional stress. Or the symptoms can build up over time, with no single event to trigger them.

Women are more likely to get fibromyalgia than are men. Many people who have fibromyalgia also have:

- Headaches.
- Jaw and facial pain due to temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders.
- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.

There's no cure for fibromyalgia. But medicines and other treatments can help control the symptoms. Exercise, talk therapy and techniques that lower stress also may help.

## Symptoms

The main symptoms of fibromyalgia include:

- **Widespread pain.** Fibromyalgia pain often is described as a constant dull ache that has lasted for at least three months. The pain is considered widespread if it happens on both sides of the body and above and below the waist.
- **Fatigue.** People with fibromyalgia often wake up tired, even though they say they sleep for a long time. Often, the pain disrupts sleep. Many people with fibromyalgia have other sleep disorders. These include restless legs syndrome and sleep apnea.
- **Thinking-related troubles.** A symptom known as "fibro fog" makes it harder to pay attention and focus on mental tasks.

Fibromyalgia often happens with other conditions, such as:

- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Migraine and other types of headaches.
- Interstitial cystitis, also called painful bladder syndrome.
- TMJ disorders.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Postural tachycardia syndrome.
- Post-COVID syndrome, also known as long COVID.

## Causes

With fibromyalgia, many researchers think nerves are affected in a way that causes the brain and spinal cord to change. This change involves an irregular rise in levels of certain chemicals in the brain that signal pain.

In addition, the brain's pain receptors seem to develop a sort of memory of the pain. They can start to overreact to painful and nonpainful signals.

Many factors likely lead to these changes, including:

- **Genes.** Fibromyalgia tends to run in families. So certain gene changes might make you more likely to get the condition.
- **Infections.** Some illnesses appear to trigger fibromyalgia or make it worse.
- **Physical or emotional events.** Sometimes, fibromyalgia can be triggered by a physical event, such as a car accident. Ongoing stress also may trigger the condition.

## Risk factors

Risk factors for fibromyalgia include:

- **Being assigned female at birth.** Fibromyalgia is more common in women than in men.
- **Family history.** You may be more likely to get fibromyalgia if a parent or sibling also has the condition.
- **Other medical conditions.** Your risk of fibromyalgia rises if you have osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus or obesity.

## Complications

The pain, fatigue, and poor sleep linked with fibromyalgia can affect your personal life and career. It also can be stressful to live with a condition that's often misunderstood by others. That can lead to mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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