

What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes pain in various parts of the body. This pain is often accompanied by fatigue. Some may even experience issues with mood, memory, and sleep disturbances. The onset is usually triggered by a traumatic event such as surgery, extreme injuries, infections, and even severe emotional stress.

Classic presentation of Fibromyalgia

- **Chronic pain:** Usually described as dull and achy, and lasting for more than 3 months.
- **Fatigue:** Waking up tired even when getting sufficient sleep. Classically accompanied by other sleep issues such as restless leg syndrome.
- **Cognitive difficulties:** Described as “fibro fog” patients may have trouble focusing and multitasking.

Fibromyalgia may present with other conditions such as:

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Migraines and headaches.
- TMJ disorder
- Anxiety/depression
- Interstitial cystitis (also called painful bladder syndrome)
- Post-covid syndrome (also known as long COVID)

Causes and risk factors of Fibromyalgia

It is thought that nerve changes in the brain or spinal cord may cause a sudden rise in chemicals that are used for signaling pain. It is believed that the brain may remember this pain and begin to respond to non-painful signals.

Causes

- Genetics
- Infections
- Trauma
- Emotional events
- Physical trauma

Risk Factors

- Family history
- Other medical conditions
- Being born a female

How do I get diagnosed?

Criteria

Pain must be present in at least 4 of the 5 regions:

- 1) Left shoulder, arm or Jaw
- 2) Right shoulder, arm or Jaw
- 3) Left lower area (hip, buttock or leg).
- 4) Right lower area, (hip, buttock or leg).

Tests

- A blood test may help to see if you have a condition other than Fibromyalgia that is causing your symptoms.
- Your doctor may test for:
 - Lupus
 - Rheumatoid arthritis
 - Sleep apnea

Treatment options for Fibromyalgia

Managing symptoms with medications

OTC medications: Pain relievers such as tylenol, ibuprofen (advil, motrin), naproxen.

Prescription medications: Antidepressants may be helpful regardless if your fibromyalgia presents with symptoms of depression. Duloxetine (cymbalta) may be effective in treating your pain symptoms. Pregabalin (lyrica), a medication typically used for seizures may help as well relieve pain symptoms as well.

Discuss any and all medications with your physician prior to use

Self nurturing

Stress management: Joining a support group is a helpful way of understanding your condition better. Techniques such as meditation or deep breathing may be helpful as well.

Quality sleep: Sleeping can help reduce the fatigue associated with fibromyalgia. Set a goal of 7-8 hours of sleep per night. Sleep in a cool dark room. Try to limit any noise disturbances. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule and try to avoid naps during the day.

Exercise: While it may be difficult at first, staying active often alleviates symptoms.

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Things to be mindful of

- Avoid tobacco products.
- Eat nutritious foods.
- Limit caffeine intake.
- Continue to do the things you enjoy.
- Try to keep activity levels consistent.
 - If you do too much on good days, the bad days might increase in frequency. In contrast, try to still be active on the days where symptoms flare up.