

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Living and coping with a chronic condition can be difficult. At times you may feel angry, depressed and isolated. It is not easy to accept the loss of good health or accept constant pain and changes in your physical appearance.

Talking about how you feel with someone who is close to you is very important. But sometimes you may feel the need to confide in someone who really understands. Arthritis New Zealand employs skilled Educators, who are always on hand. They can give you information and advice, put you in touch with support and exercise groups throughout the country and help you obtain special equipment and aids for daily living.

LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS

A variety of known techniques can help people control and reduce the effects of arthritis. Research has shown that people who exercise regularly, practise relaxation and/or use other self management techniques have less pain and are more active than those people who are not self managers.

Self management courses are available through Arthritis New Zealand. They are designed to give people the skills needed to take a more active part in their arthritis care, together with a healthcare team. Medication, physical activity, joint protection, stress management, acupuncture, heat/cold therapy and weight control to prevent extra stress on weight bearing joints, are just some of the components of self management.

ARTHRITIS NEW ZEALAND

Arthritis New Zealand is a not-for-profit organisation whose main aim is to enable a better quality of life for people affected by arthritis. Arthritis New Zealand works in the areas of education, public awareness, direct support, lobbying and funding research.

There are local Service Centres and 32 Arthritis Educators, who offer education, advice, information and guidance on services and special equipment. Arthritis Educators run highly regarded self management courses.

For more information look in the telephone directory for local contacts or contact:

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FIBROMYALGIA



Discover You Can

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KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA
Te whakapiki i te kounga ora

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WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA ?

Fibromyalgia is a condition associated with generalized muscle pain and fatigue. It is described as a form of 'soft-tissue rheumatism,' which means it is a condition that causes pain and stiffness around the joints and in muscles and bones. It does not cause inflammation.

WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

No one knows what causes fibromyalgia. Researchers speculate that it may be many different factors, alone or in combination. For example, factors such as infectious illness, physical trauma, emotional trauma or hormonal changes, may contribute to generalised pain, fatigue and sleep disturbances that characterize the condition.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Pain

Fibromyalgia manifests as widespread pain throughout the body. Although the pain may start in one area it can move around and particular activities, such as carrying groceries, can cause intense, localised pain. Some degree of pain is always present and is felt mainly in the muscles accompanied by stiffness.

Fatigue

Most people with fibromyalgia have fatigue and the kind of exhaustion felt with flu or lack of sleep. Sometimes the fatigue is severe and is a greater problem than the pain. Tiredness can be profound and may always be present to some degree or it may 'sweep' over in waves.

Tenderpoints

A specific characteristic of fibromyalgia is the presence of 18 'tenderpoints' at precise locations in the body. A muscle examination will reveal these tender areas which can be extremely painful when



pressed, but otherwise may not hurt at all. Patients may not even be aware of the presence of these tender points until a doctor performs a 'tenderpoint evaluation.'

Sleep disturbances

Sleeping problems are common and people can wake up feeling tired, even after sleeping through the night. This tiredness can range from listlessness to exhaustion and can vary from one day to the next.

Nervous System Symptoms

Changes in mood are a common symptom of fibromyalgia. Some people may experience depression and anxiety and have difficulty concentrating and performing simple everyday tasks.

Other Symptoms

People with Fibromyalgia can experience headaches, especially migraine and tension headaches, abdominal pain, muscle tension, myofascial pain, allergies, dry eyes tender lymph nodes and irritable bowel or bladder syndrome.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Fibromyalgia is diagnosed following a history of widespread pain for at least three months, and pain in at least 11 or more of the specific tenderpoint sites.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

A combination of drug treatments and self-management techniques work best.

Medications

Medications will be prescribed based on each individual's experience of the variety of fibromyalgia symptoms. Painkillers, anti-depressants and muscle relaxants may be helpful in some cases.

Treatment methods include self-management techniques and drug treatments...

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Exercise

Exercise has many benefits – it is a mood lifter, increases muscle tone, improves blood flow, eases digestive problems and aids sleep. The key to an exercise programme, especially if you are in pain, is to start gradually. Ideally the programme should include stretching, strengthening and aerobic exercise.

Relaxation techniques

Various forms of relaxation/physical therapy may help ease muscle tension and anxiety. They can also improve mobility and decrease muscle tightness. These therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Massage
- T'ai Chi
- Psychotherapy and counseling
- Manipulation
- Infrared heat
- Hot and cold packs
- Yoga

Rest

Rest may not sound like a treatment, but it can be very important. Regular rest periods at certain times of the day can help the constant fatigue. Even five minutes on the bed or couch can be restorative.

Reduce Stress

Stress will aggravate many symptoms. Unfortunately, stress is part of everyday life and cannot be avoided, so it's important to look at ways of reducing its effect. Learning to relax reduces pain and promotes restful sleep – two major goals of treatment. Choose a variety of ways to relax both physically and emotionally.