

What is **fibromyalgia**?

Fibromyalgia is a condition causing fatigue, stiffness and muscular pain. It appears to be an over-active nervous system affecting the way your body transmits pain. It causes long term, widespread pain –sometimes described as ‘hurting all over’.

The good news is that fibromyalgia is not progressive and does not cause permanent damage to your muscles, bones or joints. There is no cure, but the symptoms can be managed so you can continue most of your usual activities.



What are the symptoms?

Apart from generalised pain, other symptoms can include:

- Fatigue (extreme tiredness even after sleep)
Insomnia or poor-quality sleep – waking up tired
- Difficulty focusing and paying attention
- Gastrointestinal problems like irritable bowel syndrome
- Overactive bladder
- Tenderness to touch and pressure
- Migraine and tension headache

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms - where it hurts and how long you have experienced the pain. They might do some tests to make sure you don't have another condition instead of, or as well as, fibromyalgia.

Who gets fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia can run in families. Researchers think there may be either genetic or environmental causes, or both. Environmental events which can trigger fibromyalgia include physical trauma like a car accident or a major operation. Some people seem to have developed fibromyalgia after a viral infection. For some there is no obvious trigger.

Around 1 in 50 people develop fibromyalgia, usually 25 - 55 years of age. It is more common in women.



How can I help myself?

Lifestyle choices are an important part of managing symptoms and improving wellbeing.

Exercise developed specifically for you and your symptoms. Especially water-based exercise that puts less strain on your body. This helps manage symptoms and improve overall health.

Relaxation can help reduce stress, fatigue and pain.

Yoga and tai chi are forms of exercise that are also relaxing.

Mindfulness, deep breathing and meditation all help your body and mind to relax.

Complementary therapies like acupuncture and massage can be relaxing and pain reducing for many people.

Psychological support to make some lifestyle changes can be helpful. Things like cognitive behaviours therapy or talking to the health improvement practitioner at your GP practice.

All these can also help improve sleep quality. Improved sleep will help reduce symptoms of pain and fatigue.

Medical management

No one therapy will help all your symptoms. Your health professional will usually recommend a combination of exercise, relaxation techniques and counselling as well as medication.

Understanding how pain is transmitted in your body is a good first step to understanding how your body experiences pain differently when you have fibromyalgia. Some commonly used

pain medications are less likely to be helpful, such as paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine.

There are some medications shown to be helpful in helping fibromyalgia pain by changing the way your body transmits pain signals. These medications often improve your sleep.

Key points



Fibromyalgia is a widespread pain disorder accompanied by memory, fatigue and sleep problems. It is thought to be caused by our body changing the way it processes pain sensations so that you feel more pain, more often.



Fibromyalgia is not made up or “all in your head”. It’s often misunderstood and can be difficult to explain to people close to you. This is why understanding your condition and getting support are so important.



There is no cure but a combination of physical therapy and medicine can keep your symptoms under control so you can continue to do the things you love.

**Learn more
and find support**



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