

Fibromyalgia

- **Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes widespread pain and tenderness in the body**
- **Each person with fibromyalgia will have their own set of symptoms**
- **There is no cure for fibromyalgia, but symptoms can be managed**

Call our National Help Line on 1800 263 265

Fibromyalgia is a condition in which people experience symptoms that include widespread pain and tenderness in the body, often accompanied by fatigue and problems with memory and concentration.

Fibromyalgia affects two to five per cent of the population, mainly women, although men and adolescents can also develop the condition. It tends to develop during middle adulthood.

Symptoms

The symptoms of fibromyalgia can vary from mild to severe.

The most common symptoms are:

- increased sensitivity to pain due to a decreased pain threshold
- increased responsiveness to sensory stimuli such as heat, cold, light and smell
- extreme fatigue (tiredness)
- problems with memory and concentration (fibro fog)
- problems with sleep.

Not everyone will experience all of these symptoms. Each person with fibromyalgia will have their own unique set of symptoms.

The symptoms of fibromyalgia are variable. They can be mild, moderate or severe. Symptoms may disappear for extended periods of time, perhaps even years. Other people have pain every day, or experience variations between these two extremes.



Some people with fibromyalgia have other symptoms, such as irritable bowel syndrome, irritable or overactive bladder, headaches, and swelling, numbness or tingling in the arms and legs. Living with ongoing pain and fatigue often leads to other problems such as anxiety and depression.

Causes

No one knows what causes fibromyalgia. It's thought that it may be the result of genetic factors (or things you've inherited) and something from your environment (eg exposure to a virus or illness).

It's also believed that physical or emotional stress can trigger the start of fibromyalgia symptoms. However fibromyalgia may also appear without any obvious cause.

Fibromyalgia is more common in people with:

- lupus or rheumatoid arthritis
- family history of fibromyalgia
- previous pain syndromes
- an illness such as a virus (or a recent illness or infection)
- pain from an injury or trauma
- emotional stress and depression
- mood disorders
- substance abuse.

There is no cure for fibromyalgia, but treatment can help you manage your symptoms.

Triggers for fibromyalgia flares

At times the symptoms you experience as a result of your fibromyalgia (eg pain, fatigue) may become more intense. This is called a flare.

Produced in partnership with:



Flares can be triggered or made worse by several factors including:

- weather changes
- overexertion
- mental stress
- illness or injury
- travelling
- hormonal changes
- changes in treatment.

Triggers vary from person to person. Understanding the things that cause your fibromyalgia to flare means that you can be prepared and take steps to lessen the effect they will have on you and your life.

Diagnosis

Fibromyalgia can be difficult to diagnose as the symptoms are common to many other conditions. It may take some time to establish a diagnosis of fibromyalgia, which can be very frustrating.

Your doctor will take your medical history and description of your symptoms, and do a physical examination. This may include testing how you respond to touch at specific sites across your body.

You may also have tests, including blood tests, x-rays or scans. While these tests cannot diagnose fibromyalgia, your doctor may use them to rule out other conditions.

Treatment

While there is no cure for fibromyalgia, your symptoms can be effectively managed. This starts with a correct diagnosis. A management program will then be designed to meet your specific needs.

Generally management of fibromyalgia will involve a combination of:

Learning about your condition – knowing as much as possible about your condition means that you can make informed decisions about your healthcare and play an active role in the management of your condition.

Sleep – it's important to get a good night's sleep when you have fibromyalgia. Poor sleep – both quantity and quality – can aggravate your symptoms.

Exercise – regular physical activity has lots of general health benefits. It can also help you manage the symptoms of your condition. When you start exercising regularly you should notice an improvement in the quality of your sleep, increase in energy levels, a reduction in fatigue, and improvements in your overall strength and fitness.

Learn way to manage your pain—there are many things you can do to manage pain – and different strategies will work for different situations. For example, heat packs can help ease muscle pain, cold packs can help with inflammation, gentle exercise can help relieve muscle tension. Try different techniques until you find what works best for you.

Stress management and relaxation – stress may aggravate your symptoms. Things you can do to manage stress include planning your day and setting priorities, using relaxation techniques such as going for a walk or listening to music, and avoiding people and situations that cause you stress.

Staying at work – it's good for your health and wellbeing. Talk to your doctor about things you can do to help you get back to work or stay at work.

Massage – this can help with muscle relaxation and stress management.

Nutrition – eating a balanced diet can help provide you with better energy levels, help to maintain your weight, and give you a greater sense of wellbeing.

Support from others – family, friends, work colleagues and health professionals can help you manage. A peer support group may be another option.

Medication

Combined with other strategies, medication may be used to manage your pain, reduce stress and help you sleep.

There are different types of medication that your doctor may recommend depending on your symptoms:

- **pain-relievers (analgesics)** – e.g. paracetamol - for temporary pain relief



- **anti-inflammatory or analgesic creams and gels** - may provide some temporary pain relief
- **anti-depressant medications** – may be used in small doses to reduce pain and help you sleep.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Rheumatologist
- Physiotherapist
- Exercise physiologist
- *MOVE muscle, bone & joint health*
National Help Line: 1800 263 265

Things to remember

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This information has been produced in consultation with and approved by: MOVE muscle, bone & joint health Ltd.

How we can help

Call our National Help Line and speak to our nurses
Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@move.org.au

Visit our website move.org.au for information on:

- muscle, bone and joint conditions
- ways to live well with a muscle, bone and joint condition
- our new resource *Managing your pain: An A-Z guide*
- programs and services
- peer support groups
- upcoming webinars, seminars and other events.

More to explore

- **Arthritis Research UK**
www.arthritisresearchuk.org
- **Better Health Channel**
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- **Australian Physiotherapy Association**
www.physiotherapy.asn.au
- **Exercise and Sports Science Australia**
www.essa.org.au

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