

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia, or fibromyalgia syndrome, is a condition that causes aches and pain all over the body. People with fibromyalgia often experience other symptoms, such as extreme tiredness or sleeping, mood, or memory problems. Fibromyalgia affects more women than men. The pain, extreme tiredness, and lack of sleep that fibromyalgia causes can affect your ability to work or do daily activities. Treatment can help relieve pain and help prevent flare-ups of symptoms.

Q: Who gets fibromyalgia?

A: Fibromyalgia is more common in people who:

- Have obesity
- Smoke
- Have another rheumatic (related to the joints) condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus
- Have a close relative with fibromyalgia. Researchers think a gene or genes may cause pain when pain would not normally happen.
- Have or had trauma to the brain or spinal cord. Physical trauma may come from an injury or repeated injuries, illness, or an accident. Emotional stress or trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, may also lead to fibromyalgia.

Q: What are the symptoms of fibromyalgia?

A: Chronic (long-term), widespread pain is the most common symptom of fibromyalgia.

Other symptoms of fibromyalgia include:

- Extreme tiredness, called fatigue, that does not get better with sleep or rest
- Cognitive and memory problems (sometimes called “fibro fog”)

- Trouble sleeping
- Mood problems
- Morning fatigue
- Muscle fatigue, causing muscles to twitch or cramp
- Headaches
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Painful menstrual periods
- Numbness or tingling of hands and feet
- Restless legs syndrome
- Temperature sensitivity
- Sensitivity to loud noises or bright lights
- Depression or anxiety

Q: What causes fibromyalgia symptoms to flare?

A: Fibromyalgia symptoms can happen without warning. But certain events may trigger flare-ups, including:

- **Hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle or pregnancy.** You may have more trouble sleeping, more widespread pain, or headaches just before your period when your hormone levels drop. Your periods may also be more painful.
- **Stress.** Chronic (long-term) stress may raise your risk for getting fibromyalgia. Also, short-term stress, such as work stress, or stressful events, such as a death of a loved one, can trigger flare-ups in people who have fibromyalgia.

- **Changes in weather.** Some women report pain when the temperature drops from warm to cold or on hot, humid days.

Q: How is fibromyalgia treated?

A: Treatment for fibromyalgia may include:

- **Medicine to treat your pain.** The Food and Drug Administration has approved three medicines to treat fibromyalgia: pregabalin, duloxetine, and milnacipran. Your doctor may also suggest pain relievers or antidepressants for certain symptoms or to prevent flare-ups.
- **Talk therapy.** Counseling sessions with a trained counselor can teach you different skills and techniques you can use to better control your pain.

Q: What steps can I take at home to relieve fibromyalgia symptoms?

A: You can take the following steps at home to help relieve your symptoms:

- **Getting enough sleep.** Talk to your doctor or nurse about any sleep problems you have and ways to treat them.
- **Getting regular physical activity.** Studies show that for many women with fibromyalgia, regular physical activity can reduce pain.
- **Trying complementary or alternative therapies,** such as acupuncture, tai chi, or yoga.

For more information...

For more information about fibromyalgia, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS

800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/fibromyalgia.htm

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), NIH, HHS

877-226-4267 • www.niams.nih.gov

Arthritis Foundation

800-283-7800 • www.arthritis.org

National Fibromyalgia Association

www.fmaware.org

National Fibromyalgia Partnership, Inc.

866-725-4404 • www.fmpartnership.org

The Office on Women's Health is grateful for the additional reviews by:

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