

## About Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a condition in which the main symptoms are widespread chronic pain and fatigue. The condition is considered a rheumatic disease like many forms of arthritis. But there are key differences. Fibromyalgia does not cause inflammation or damage joints or muscles.

Fibromyalgia is not life-threatening but can affect many aspects of daily life. It can occur by itself but may also affect people with other forms of arthritis or chronic conditions. The good news is that it's not considered a progressive disease. With proper treatment and lifestyle changes, symptoms can improve.

Doctors don't know what causes fibromyalgia, but it most likely involves various factors and/or triggers working together. These may include genes, infections or illnesses and physical or emotional trauma.

## Signs and Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia has been described as a constellation of symptoms affecting various body parts and functions. From muscle pain to sleep disturbances and anxiety, here are some common symptoms.

**Pain** – Widespread musculoskeletal pain is the most common symptom of fibromyalgia. It generally occurs at multiple sites throughout the body, although it may start in one region, such as the shoulders, and later occur in other areas over time.

**Fatigue** – Most people with fibromyalgia have fatigue, decreased endurance or the kind of exhaustion felt with the flu or lack of sleep. Sometimes the fatigue is severe

## FAST FACTS

- **Fibromyalgia affects about 4 million Americans.**
- **Two-thirds of people with fibromyalgia are women.**
- **Women who have a family member with fibromyalgia are more likely to develop this condition.**
- **People with rheumatic diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus or ankylosing spondylitis are also more likely to develop fibromyalgia.**
- **Symptoms usually appear between ages 30 and 55.**
- **Though more common in adults, children (especially adolescent girls) may develop fibromyalgia.**

and it can be a much greater problem than the pain.

**Sleep Disturbances** – The problems with sleep vary from person to person. Some people have difficulty falling asleep; others sleep lightly and wake up frequently during the night. Most people with fibromyalgia wake up feeling tired, even after sleeping through the night.

## For More Information

**Fibromyalgia Information**  
[arthritis.org/about-arthritis](https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis)

**Arthritis Foundation Helpline**  
1-800-283-7800 | [helpline@arthritis.org](mailto:helpline@arthritis.org)

**Mood and Concentration Problems** – Feeling sad or being down is common. People with fibromyalgia also may feel anxious and have difficulty concentrating or performing simple mental tasks. These problems tend to come and go and are often most prominent at times of extreme fatigue or anxiety. Some people with fibromyalgia have depression.

**Other Problems** – Headaches, jaw pain, abdominal or pelvic pain, dizziness, restless legs and numbness or tingling in hands and feet may occur.

### Diagnosing Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia can't be diagnosed with laboratory tests. An accurate fibromyalgia diagnosis is based on a detailed medical and family history and physical exam. Your doctor may order blood tests and take X-rays to rule out other conditions that may also cause chronic pain and fatigue.

### Treating Fibromyalgia

Treating fibromyalgia usually involves a multi-faceted approach that includes medication, nondrug therapies and self-management. It may take some trial and error to find an effective combination of treatments.

Medications are prescribed to relieve pain and improve sleep. There are three medications approved specifically to treat fibromyalgia symptoms. Other medications, mainly antidepressants, are used off-label to

 **SELF-MANAGEMENT IS KEY**

**The following self-care activities can help you manage your fibromyalgia:**

- **Getting regular physical activity**
- **Caring for emotional health**
- **Balancing rest and activity (activity pacing)**
- **Practicing good sleep hygiene**
- **Maintaining a healthy weight through balancing diet and exercise**
- **Utilizing complementary therapies (e.g., massage, meditation)**

treat symptoms. Over-the-counter and prescribed pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications may also be used for pain relief. (Learn more about medications for fibromyalgia at [arthritis.org/drug-guide](http://arthritis.org/drug-guide).)

Nondrug therapies may include biofeedback, acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy, stress management or hydrotherapy.

### FAQ

**What's the difference between fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)?** The conditions are similar and likely related. What differentiates them is that while fibromyalgia's primary symptom is pain, CFS's primary symptom is crippling fatigue.

**What is fibro fog?** A common symptom among people with fibromyalgia is known as "fibro fog," which impairs the ability to focus, pay attention and concentrate on mental tasks.

**Why do antidepressants help treat fibromyalgia?** Certain antidepressants have been shown to help not only with depression but with pain and sleep issues associated with fibromyalgia. These antidepressants are effective whether you have depression or not. This may be because they increase levels of neurotransmitters, like serotonin and epinephrine, in the brain, which in turn may block pain signals.