

# Fibromyalgia

**Fibromyalgia is a disorder that involves pain and tenderness throughout the body as well many other symptoms.**

Fibromyalgia is a complicated condition. It tends to last a long time, although people do get better. It is not life threatening. Although fibromyalgia is considered similar to arthritis because it causes pain in the joints and muscles and can interfere with physical activity, it does not cause inflammation or damage to the body. In addition to pain, the most common symptoms are sleep problems, feeling tired, problems with memory and thinking clearly, and depression.

Many people who have fibromyalgia have other conditions as well, such as temporomandibular joint disorder, irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis, headaches, restless legs syndrome, and other chronic pain conditions such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. It is not known whether these conditions are related.

The April 16, 2014, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about fibromyalgia.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of fibromyalgia may include diffuse pain and tenderness; headache; sore throat; stomach pain; memory problems; fatigue; sleep problems; morning stiffness; painful menstrual periods; numbness, burning, or tingling of the arms and legs; sensitivity to temperature; and sensitivity to loud noises or bright lights.

## Causes

The causes of fibromyalgia are not known but it probably results from many factors that can include a physically or emotionally stressful event, repetitive injury, or illness.

Doctors think that how a person's brain responds to pain plays a role, perhaps from inheriting certain genes. People with fibromyalgia are unusually sensitive to pain, heat, noise, and scent. Imaging shows that in such patients, the neurotransmitters that control pain and other sensory stimuli may be too sensitive.

## Diagnosis

Fibromyalgia can be hard to diagnose, and many people with fibromyalgia see many doctors before getting a diagnosis. Sometimes, doctors may think a patient's pain is not real. There is no laboratory test, so doctors need to rule out other problems first. Diagnosis includes, along with other physical and emotional symptoms, a history of widespread pain (above and below the waist and on the right and left sides) that lasts more than 3 months. There are 19 points in the body that may feel tender; this can help with the diagnosis.



## Treatment

Try to find the support of a doctor with experience treating fibromyalgia. A team approach may work best, including a doctor, physical therapist, and you. You may find help at a pain or rheumatology clinic.

Medications can include tricyclics, gabapentinoids, serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, and painkillers such as aspirin and ibuprofen.

Complementary and alternative therapies exist for fibromyalgia. Many people with fibromyalgia have tried treatments such as acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage therapy. There are some data showing that the following may be helpful: tai chi, qi gong, massage therapy, acupuncture, and spa treatment, including hydro (water) therapy.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases  
[www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/fibromyalgia](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/fibromyalgia)

**+** To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on *JAMA*'s website at [jama.com](http://jama.com). Many are available in English and Spanish.

**Author:** Deborah Tolmach Sugerman, MSW

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** The author has completed and submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and none were reported.

**Sources:** National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases Yuvenco C. Fibromyalgia. In: Ferri FF. *Ferri's Clinical Advisor 2014*. Philadelphia, PA: Mosby Elsevier; 2014:425-426.

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, *JAMA* suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.