

## Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic illness that causes aching pain all over the body. You may also feel pain when lightly touched. It affects all ethnic groups, up to 10 million Americans and up to 3% of people in the world. It is more common in women than in men, and is less common in children.

### Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Trouble sleeping
- Morning stiffness
- Stomach upset
- Depression
- Anxiety

### Causes

Doctors think they know some causes of FM. Chemicals and links in the brain and the spinal cord help decrease the amount of pain we feel. This process may not work well in people with FM. It can start without a clear cause, or can be started by injuries, a severe illness, low blood pressure, and abnormal hormone. It may also run in your family. Some people with FM have very flexible joints and ligaments. There is research going on to learn more about the causes.

### Diagnosis

Fibromyalgia is diagnosed by looking at your health history and after a careful exam. Right now, there is no test. Some people (even doctors) feel it is not a “real” condition. This is not true. We know it is real, and people can improve their symptoms with the right treatment.

Other diseases can look like fibromyalgia, and your health care provider will screen you for those before diagnosing you.

Your provider will be looking for a history of chronic pain that involves most of the body, along with fatigue, sleep issues, and tenderness.

### Treatment

You, your provider and physical therapist all play a part in your treatment. The most helpful will be working with a rehab team. If you have tight muscles, they will show you exercises to stretch them. You will learn ways to improve posture and decrease strain on muscles and joints. Studies suggest that light exercise, such as swimming or walking, can decrease pain and tenderness, improve fitness and help sleep patterns.

It can be painful at first. Start with as little as five minutes at a time, working towards a goal of twenty or thirty minutes, four or more times a week.

### Pain Management

Coping with chronic pain can be hard. Your provider may suggest you visit a health psychologist or take classes on coping with pain. You can learn new ways to cope with your pain, relieve stress and relax.

Medicines can help treat depression, improve sleep and relax muscles. Some pain medicines may help but work best when combined with other tools. Opioid medicines (morphine and related drugs) do not work well for treating fibromyalgia and are rarely used.

Heat, cold, massage, and acupuncture may give short-term relief, though they are not a cure. Most people find the greatest help is to combine exercise, medicine and coping and relaxation tools.

## **Living with Fibromyalgia**

Your treatment team will work with you to reach a higher level of function at work, home, and throughout your daily life. They will help you to have less pain, if they can. There is no known cure so we cannot expect your symptoms to go away. By working with your team, you should be able to function better and enjoy your life.

## **To Learn More**

National Fibromyalgia Association  
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[www.fmaware.org](http://www.fmaware.org)

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[www.fmnetnews.com](http://www.fmnetnews.com)

Fibromyalgia.com  
[www.fibromyalgia.com](http://www.fibromyalgia.com)

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Linden, VA 22642-5609  
Toll Free Phone: **866-725-4404**  
[www.fmpartnership.org](http://www.fmpartnership.org)

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