

Fibromyalgia

What is fibromyalgia?

The term fibromyalgia means pain in fibrous and muscular tissues. It is a chronic (ongoing) condition of pain, stiffness, and usually fatigue.

Fibromyalgia is more common than most people realize. As many as 3% to 6% of all people have fibromyalgia. It is less common in older adults, and more women have it than men.



How does it occur?

What fibromyalgia is exactly, or what causes it, is not known. Studies have shown that many people with the condition have abnormal sleep brain waves (EEGs). Others make less of the hormone called cortisol. Stress, anxiety, depression, illness, or poor sleep may contribute to the problem. The symptoms may get worse when you overexert yourself or when the weather is damp and cold.



What are the symptoms?

Pain is the main symptom. The aches, pains, and stiffness in muscles, joints, and soft tissues get worse or better from day to day or week to week. The pain also tends to move from one part of the body to another. It is most common in the neck, chest, arms, legs, hips, and back.

Other common symptoms are:

tiredness

headaches

anxiety

depression



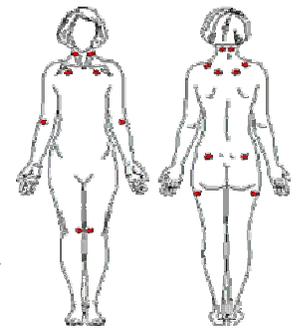
problems with the digestive system, especially trouble swallowing, recurrent abdominal pain, or diarrhea.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no single diagnostic test for fibromyalgia. Your health care provider

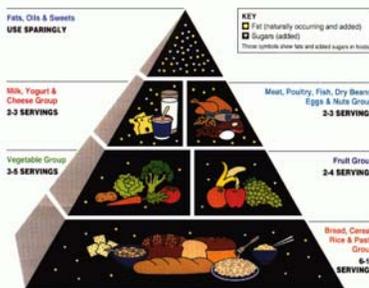
will ask about your medical history and your patterns of symptoms. He or she will examine you, looking for places that are tender.

If, after considering your medical history and examining you, your health care provider is not sure about your diagnosis, he or she may order a test to look for abnormal sleep patterns. This test is called a sleep electroencephalogram. You may also have a test to check the level of cortisol in your blood, to see if your body is making



Fibromyalgia Tender Points

How is it treated?



The most successful treatment for fibromyalgia is a healthy diet and balanced exercise and rest.

The diet should include a large variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods provide the body with trace elements and minerals that help the muscles. Also, the fiber in fruits and vegetables helps the digestive system.

Exercise affects the levels of many biochemicals in the body, particularly in the nervous system. This may be why symptoms of fibromyalgia often improve when people exercise regularly. Because much of the pain of fibromyalgia is in the muscles and joints, you should begin an exercise program gradually, as recommended by your health care provider. Include good warm-ups and cool-downs. Do types of exercise that do not hurt your joints.



Rest is as important as diet and exercise in the treatment of fibromyalgia. Make sure you get enough restful sleep. In the evening avoid stimulating foods and drinks (such as coffee) and certain medicines (for example, decongestants).

If diet, exercise, and adequate rest do not relieve your symptoms, your health care provider may prescribe medicine. The drugs might include antidepressants, muscle relaxants, and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Your health care provider can also help to find other ways to reduce your pain and fatigue. For example, you may benefit from massage therapy or a home exercise program recommended by a physical therapist.

How long will the effects last?

Fibromyalgia is a chronic problem. The symptoms sometimes improve and at other times worsen, but they will probably continue for months to years. Although the illness can produce much discomfort, it is not life threatening.

What can I do to prevent fibromyalgia?

There is no known way to prevent fibromyalgia. However, as with many medical problems, staying as healthy as possible with a good diet, safe exercise, and enough rest is the best prevention.

Developed by McKesson Clinical Reference Systems.

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