

## How Can Fibromyalgia Be Treated?

There is currently no cure for fibromyalgia, but there are ways to help manage symptoms. These are:

- Medications** – such as painkillers, anti-inflammatories, and sleeping tablets although many drugs do not give a long-term solution to the problem, and can often come with equally troubling side-effects.
- CBT** – as there is a degree of mental health involved with fibromyalgia; depression, anxiety, and coming to terms with a long-term illness, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy may help a patient to learn to manage their condition
- Holistic Therapies** – such as massage, hydrotherapy, acupuncture, osteopathy, meditation may help relieve some of the symptoms in a gentle way, although the benefits may not be long lasting.
- Exercise** – Because the muscles of fibromyalgia patients feel so tense, they are more vulnerable to sprains and strains. With very careful tailoring so as not to make the symptoms worse, exercise is beneficial in keeping a patient's muscles from seizing up, and also helps to boost mood through raising endorphins. Gentle exercise such as swimming and Pilates is often recommended.
- Rest** - Rest is one of the key treatments for fibromyalgia. There are no shortcuts.
- Diet** – symptoms can sometimes be improved by tweaks in the diet. A sufferer may have intolerances to certain foods which may be best avoided. An increase in fruit, vegetables and water can help alleviate symptoms.

This leaflet is brought to you by:



### helpful things to say to someone with chronic pain...

- ◇ how can I help you?
- ◇ tell me more about your illness
- ◇ that must really hurt
- ◇ you are doing your best: thats enough
- ◇ you are not a burden
- ◇ I am here for you
- ◇ do you want to do coffee and a chat?
- ◇ lets do something fun
- ◇ lets pencil it in

### unhelpful things to say to someone with chronic pain...

- ◇ I know how you feel
- ◇ have you tried... you should try...
- ◇ are you better now?

### For more information:

**Fibromyalgia UK** -  
[www.fmuk.org](http://www.fmuk.org)

**Stratford Fibro Friends** -  
07587 143 374



### Sources and resources:

Fibromyalgia Information Booklet. Published by Arthritis Research Campaign 2007

Fibromyalgia A Guide To Understanding the Journey by Shelly Bolton

Fibromyalgia for Dummies, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2007

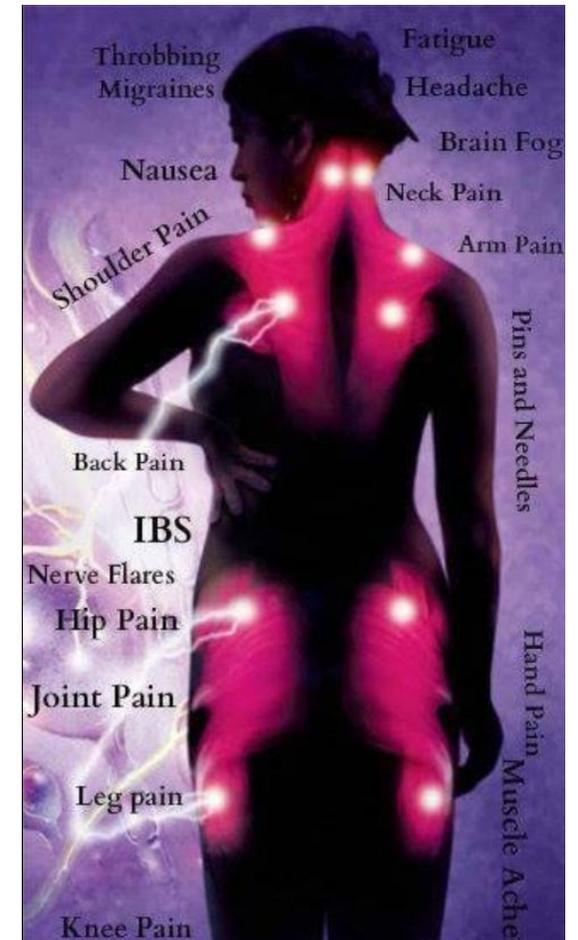
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Fibromyalgia/Pages/Symptoms.aspx>

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/fibromyalgia-leaflet>

<https://www.sruk.co.uk/conditions/fibromyalgia>

# Fibromyalgia

## ...The Irritable Everything Syndrome



## What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a name for widespread pain affecting the muscles but not the joints. It is a chronic condition but is not life-threatening or progressive and does not cause permanent damage to muscles, bones or joints.

There are usually no outward signs of the condition and people with fibromyalgia often look well but feel awful. Because of this, other people may not appreciate the pain and tiredness that the sufferer is experiencing, and this can cause additional distress. However, it is important to recognise that the pain suffered by people with fibromyalgia is real and may be severe, even though it is not usually associated with visible swelling or deformities of muscles or joints.

Fibromyalgia is a relatively common condition, and it occurs more often in women than in men. The amount of pain varies from person to person and from day to day; sometimes it can even fluctuate during a day. The pain may be quite mild most days, or it may be so severe that it affects the person's work and social life. Some people find that the pain feels worse in cold or damp weather.

In fibromyalgia the tendons and ligaments, or fibrous tissues (fibro-), and the muscles (-my-) are affected by pain (-algia) and tenderness. It can feel as though the pain affects the whole body.



*The only certain thing about chronic pain is that there is no certainty.*

*One day a person with chronic pain may feel well enough to do some activities and another day getting out of bed may prove too painful.*

## What are the Symptoms of Fibromyalgia?

**Pain, tiredness and sleep disturbance** are the main symptoms of fibromyalgia. Most people feel the pain of fibromyalgia as aching, stiffness and tiredness in the muscles around the joints. It may feel worse first thing in the morning, or as the day goes on, or with activity. It may be particularly bad in one part of the body or may be equally bad in several different areas such as the limbs, neck and back. Patients with fibromyalgia often feel that they have pain all over their bodies.

In addition to the main symptoms, there are over 200 other symptoms associated with fibromyalgia. Some of the most common are:

-  **Poor circulation** - tingling, numbness or swelling of the hands and feet, can include 'pins & needles'
-  **Forgetfulness or poor concentration** (brain fog)
-  **Increased sensitivity** to light, noise, smell, touch, pain, chemicals, foods
-  **Stiffness and muscle spasms**
-  **Irritable bowel** – uncomfortable bowels, diarrhoea, constipation
-  **Irritable bladder** – feeling an urgent/frequent need to pass water
-  **Headaches**
-  **Depression / anxiety and psychological distress**
-  **Blurred / double vision**
-  **Heartburn**
-  **Dry skin, eyes, mouth, nasal passageways**

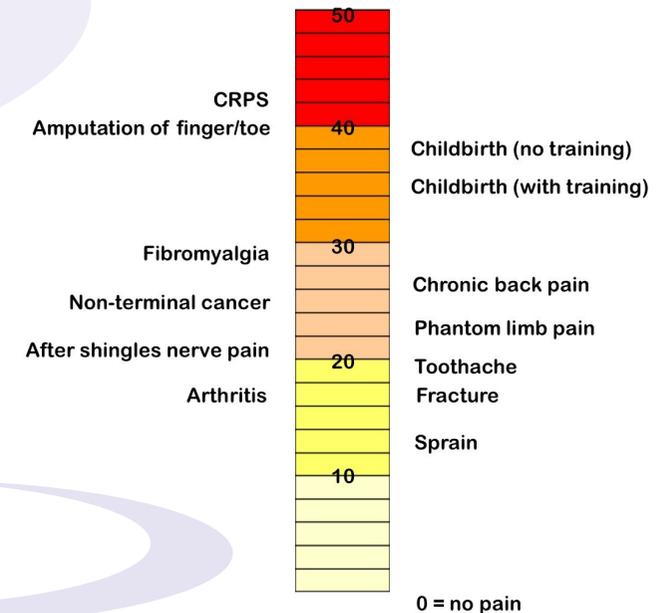
Sometimes severe tiredness (fatigue) can be the most severe aspect of fibromyalgia. There may be overall tiredness and lack of energy, or muscular fatigue and loss of stamina. Either way, it can be difficult to climb the stairs, do the household chores, go shopping or go to work. Waking in the morning feeling unrefreshed is common.

## What causes Fibromyalgia?

The cause of fibromyalgia is not yet known. However, research has shown that people with fibromyalgia have certain subtle changes in some chemicals in the brain and nervous system. For example, there seems to be a minor change in the level of certain brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. These are the chemicals responsible for transmitting messages between nerves and between brain cells. This may affect the way pain messages are transmitted.

A current main theory is that people with fibromyalgia have an oversensitivity to pain signals in the brain. This is called central sensitisation. This may be due to various minor changes in brain chemicals. What triggers or causes these changes is not yet known.

### The McGill Pain Index



The McGill Pain Index is a rigorously tested scientific pain scale. Overall score is determined by compiling various numerical and cross-referenced descriptive words, allowing direct comparison across conditions.