PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Fibromyalgia

This information explains fibromyalgia (fie-bro-my-AL-juh). It also describes some of its common symptoms and how it can be treated.

About Fibromyalgia



Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes pain in your muscles, ligaments, and tendons.

Ligaments are bands of tissue that connect one bone to another. They help keep your joints stable. Tendons are bands of tissue that connect a muscle to a bone. They help control your joints' movement.

Most people start to have symptoms of fibromyalgia between the ages of 30 and 55. It's more common in female adults, but children and male adults can also have it.

We do not know what causes fibromyalgia.

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

This section has information about the most common symptoms of fibromyalgia. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

Click on the interactive module above to see how fibromyalgia may affect your body.

Pain

Fibromyalgia causes chronic (long-lasting) pain in many parts of your body. You may feel different types of pain at different times. You may feel:

- Aching, soreness, or tenderness.
- Tingling (slight stinging or poking).
- Throbbing (pounding).
- Stiffness.
- Burning.

Your pain can get worse if you:

- Do not sleep well.
- Are out in the cold, such as being outside in cold weather.
- Have anxiety (strong feelings of worry or fear).
- Have stress.

Early on, you may only feel pain in one part of your body. Your pain can get worse and spread to other parts of your body as time goes on.

Fatigue and trouble sleeping

Fibromyalgia also causes fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual). When you have fatigue, you may:

- Feel weak.
- Have trouble focusing.
- Feel depressed (strong feelings of sadness).

Some people have fatigue because their body and mind get very tired trying to fight the chronic pain. Others have fatigue because their pain keeps them from

getting a full night's sleep.

It's common for people with fibromyalgia to have trouble sleeping. You may have problems falling or staying asleep. Many people with fibromyalgia also have sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea. Sleep apnea causes you to stop breathing for short periods of time while you're sleeping.

Other common symptoms

Many people with fibromyalgia also have:

- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Migraine headaches.
- Dry eyes.
- Dizziness.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). IBS is a group of symptoms related to your large intestine (colon). IBS symptoms include:
  - Abdominal (belly) pain.
  - Bloating.
  - Diarrhea (loose or watery poop).
  - Constipation (pooping less often than usual).
- Discomfort in their abdomen (belly) and bladder. Your bladder is the organ that stores your urine (pee) before it leaves your body.
- Raynaud's (ray-NOSE) disease. This is a condition where some areas of your body (usually your fingers or toes) feel numb and cold.

Diagnosing Fibromyalgia

There are no exact tests used to diagnose (find the cause of) fibromyalgia. To find out if you have fibromyalgia, your healthcare provider will:

- Review your health history.

- Study your symptoms.
- Give you a physical exam.

They may also order blood tests or X-rays. These can help to rule out other possible causes for your pain.

Treatment for Fibromyalgia

There are treatments that can help ease your fibromyalgia symptoms. The amount of time it takes for symptoms to improve is different for everyone.

The type of treatment you get depends on how long you have had your symptoms. It can also depend on how bad your symptoms are. Talk with your healthcare provider about what treatments are best for you.

Medication

Your healthcare provider may give you medication to treat your fibromyalgia symptoms. This can help to ease your pain, improve your mood, and sleep better.

Physical therapy

Doing physical therapy can help improve your symptoms. Talk with your healthcare provider about what exercises can help you.

Mental health counseling

Seeing a mental health professional, such as a counselor or psychiatrist, can help you deal with fibromyalgia. Therapy can also help if you're feeling anxious or depressed.

The MSK Counseling Center provides counseling services that may be helpful to you. For more information or to schedule an appointment, ask your healthcare provider or call 646-888-0200.

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are treatments you can use along with your other treatments. They can help ease your symptoms. Examples are tai chi (ty-CHEE), yoga, acupuncture (AK-yoo-PUNK-cher), and massage. If you're interested in complementary therapies, ask your healthcare provider for a referral to MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service. You can also visit www.msk.org/integrativemedicine or call 646-449-1010.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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