

# 9061 - Fibromyalgia

## Definition:

A chronic condition characterized by widespread pain in your muscles, ligaments and tendons, as well as fatigue and multiple tender points — places on your body where slight pressure causes pain.

1. 'Fibro' refers to fibrous tissues, like tendons, ligaments and fascia.
2. 'Myo' refers to muscle.
3. 'Algia' means pain. An analgesic is a pain killer.

## Facts:

Research done in London, Ontario in 1997 found that a little over 3% of Canadians suffer from fibromyalgia. Currently, it is estimated to be up to 5% (1.5 million Canadians) with some incidents in children. Women are much more likely to develop the disorder than are men, and the risk of fibromyalgia increases with age. Fibromyalgia symptoms often begin after a physical or emotional trauma, but in many cases there appears to be no triggering event.

## Symptoms:

Widespread pain and tender points. The pain associated with fibromyalgia is described as a constant dull ache, typically arising from muscles. To be considered widespread, the pain must occur on both sides of your body and above and below your waist. Signs and symptoms can vary, depending on the weather, stress, physical activity or even the time of day.

Additional pain when firm pressure is applied to specific areas of your body, called tender points. Tender point locations include:

- Back of the head
- Front sides of neck
- Upper hips
- Between shoulder blades
- Upper chest
- Sides of hips
- Top of shoulders
- Outer elbows
- Inner knees

## Fatigue and sleep disturbances:

People with fibromyalgia often awaken tired, even though they seem to get plenty of sleep. Experts believe that these people rarely reach the deep restorative stage of sleep. Sleep disorders that have been linked to fibromyalgia include restless legs syndrome and sleep apnea.

**Causes:** Doctors don't know what causes fibromyalgia, but it most likely involves a variety of factors working together. These may include:

- *Genetics* - tends to run in families
- *Infection* - some illnesses appear to trigger/aggravate fibromyalgia
- *Physical/emotional trauma* - post-traumatic stress disorder has been linked

Source: Mayo Clinic and CFMS Canada

## **Risk Factors:**

- *Gender* - occurs more often in women than in men.
- *Age* - tends to develop in early/middle adulthood can also occur in children/older adults.
- *Disturbed sleep patterns* - it's unclear why but people with sleep disorders such as nighttime muscle spasms in the legs, restless legs syndrome or sleep apnea — often have fibromyalgia.
- *Rheumatic disease* - if you have a rheumatic disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, you may be more likely to develop fibromyalgia.

## **Living with Fibromyalgia:**

Fibromyalgia isn't progressive and generally doesn't lead to other conditions or diseases. It can, however, lead to pain, depression and lack of sleep. These problems can then interfere with your ability to function at home or on the job, or maintain close family or personal relationships. The frustration of dealing with an often-misunderstood condition also can be a complication of the condition.

## **Treatments:**

In general, treatments for fibromyalgia include both medication and self-care. The emphasis is on minimizing symptoms and improving general health.

- *Reduce stress* - Develop a plan to avoid or limit overexertion and emotional stress. Allow yourself time each day to relax. That may mean learning how to say no without guilt. But try not to change your routine completely. People who quit work or drop all activity tend to do worse than those who remain active. Try stress management techniques, such as deep-breathing exercises or meditation.
- *Get enough sleep* - Because fatigue is one of the main characteristics of fibromyalgia, getting sufficient sleep is essential. In addition to allotting enough time for sleep, practice good sleep habits, such as going to bed and getting up at the same time each day and limiting daytime napping.
- *Exercise regularly* - At first, exercise may increase your pain. But doing it regularly often decreases symptoms. Appropriate exercises may include walking, swimming, biking and water aerobics. A physical therapist can help you develop a home exercise program. Stretching, good posture and relaxation exercises also are helpful.
- *Maintain healthy nutrition* - Eat healthy foods. Limit your caffeine, alcohol and sugar intake as they can irritate muscles and stress the system. Vitamins/supplements that support the immune system and reduce stress may be a beneficial approach.
- *Pace yourself* - Keep your activity on an even level. If you do too much on your good days, you may have more bad days. Do something that you find enjoyable and fulfilling every day.