



Fact Sheet for Patients and Families

Fibromyalgia

What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia [fy-broh-my-AL-juh]

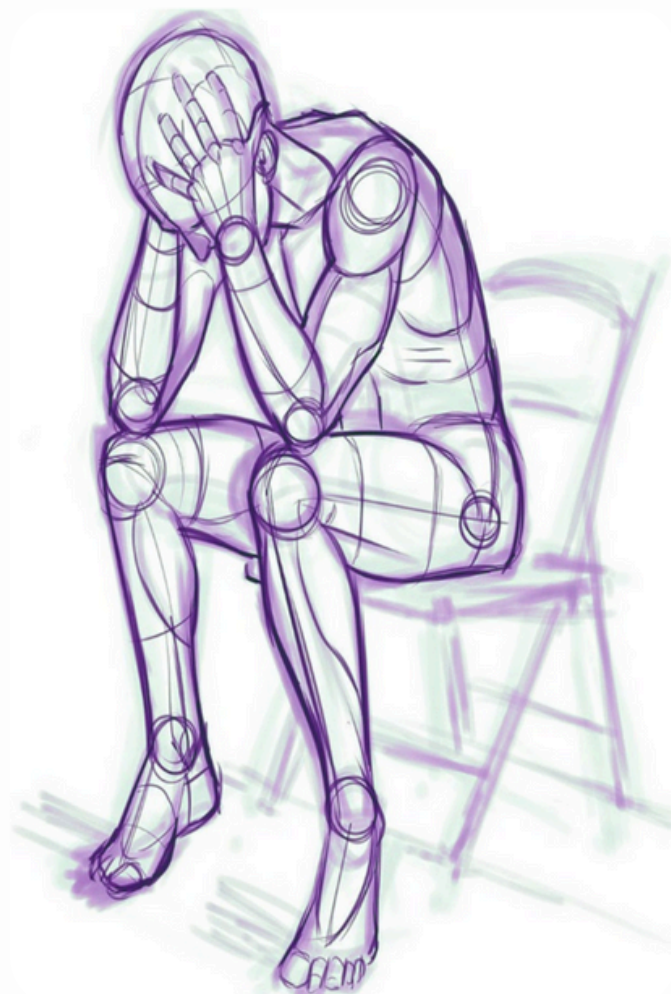
is a chronic (long term) condition that causes widespread pain and tenderness in muscles, unrefreshing sleep, physical exhaustion and memory and thinking difficulties. Fibromyalgia management often needs a combination of treatments. There is no magic-bullet cure.

What we do know:

- the pain is real
- it is not a mental health condition

What causes fibromyalgia?

While the exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown, it is thought to involve abnormal pain processing in the brain. This causes an amplified pain perception for the person with fibromyalgia.





What causes fibromyalgia? *(Continued)*

Some things that increase the likelihood of fibromyalgia occurring may include:

- A family history of the condition,
- Stressful or traumatic events (e.g., car accident, major illness)
- Complex injuries, and/or
- Some pre-existing illnesses (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, osteoarthritis, ME/CFS).

Some people develop fibromyalgia without any of the above risk factors.

What are the symptoms?

Everyone is unique in the symptoms they have. The most common symptoms are:

- Pain and tenderness in the muscles throughout the body. Pain may be throbbing, aching, shooting, burning, stabbing or tingling. Some people have prolonged pain and some have pain when the skin is very lightly touched (allodynia)
- Unrefreshing sleep that leads to persistent fatigue (mental and physical exhaustion)

There are many other symptoms that vary from day to day and person to person.

How is fibromyalgia diagnosed?

Fibromyalgia is often diagnosed after doctors have ruled out other common causes for your symptoms. To help diagnose fibromyalgia, your healthcare provider will take your medical history including your symptoms, do a physical exam and may order tests to rule out other possible causes of your symptoms, like a thyroid condition or other joint problems.

There is no simple test, like x-rays or blood tests that can detect fibromyalgia. Research with specialized scans has shown that fibromyalgia patients feel pain in a larger area of the brain and for longer periods of time compared to people who are healthy.



How is fibromyalgia treated?

Fibromyalgia may be treated with a combination of therapies. Some include medication and others do not.

Non-medication therapies

- **Exercise.** This is the most effective treatment for fibromyalgia. The key is to start slowly and increase activity slowly to avoid overdoing. Low-impact aerobic activities (like walking or swimming), stretching exercises, yoga, and tai chi are great options.
- **Sleep therapy.** To improve sleep, create regular sleep habits – such as going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time – practice box breathing. Avoid naps or drinking caffeinated drinks. Smoking or vaping (nicotine or cannabis products) can also worsen fibromyalgia sleep problems.
- **Complementary therapies.** These may include massage, acupuncture, or chiropractic treatments.
- **Counselling therapy.** A therapist can teach you coping skills on how to help manage pain, anxiety and stress associated with chronic illnesses.
- **Positive support groups.** Seek and provide support with like-minded people who understand what you are going through.



My Follow-up Appointment

Doctor:

Date/ Time:

Place:



Your healthcare provider may prescribe one or more medications for your condition. Many fibromyalgia patients are sensitive to drugs and tolerate them better by starting with small doses and increasing gradually, if needed.

- There are two medications formally approved by Health Canada specifically for the treatment of fibromyalgia: duloxetine (Cymbalta™), and pregabalin (Lyrica™). These two drugs each work differently to change pain pathways to reduce pain.
- Some antidepressants help balance certain brain chemicals to reduce pain, improve sleep and improve mood by treating depression, anxiety, or stress caused by having a chronic illness. Other medications may be considered, depending on your individual symptoms.

It takes time to see results from these medications. The length of time depends on the individual medication.

Every medication does not work for everyone, and sometimes the side effects outweigh the benefits. Medications must be assessed by your healthcare providers to consider your other medical conditions, prescription and non-prescription drugs and natural products.

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