

Fibromyalgia Mythbusters



*Debunking Stereotypes, Stigma and
Misconceptions – One Myth at a Time*

MYTH #01

“When Doctors Can’t Figure Out What Is Wrong With You, They Call It Fibromyalgia.”

FACT

Fibromyalgia Is A Criteria-Based Diagnosis.

Fibromyalgia is not a diagnosis of exclusion. There are specific features that must be met in order to receive a diagnosis ([see the 2016 diagnosis criteria here](#)).

Tests may be ordered to rule out other conditions that may present with similar symptoms.



- [2016 Revisions to the 2010/2011 fibromyalgia diagnostic criteria](#)
- [Modified 2016 American College of Rheumatology Fibromyalgia Criteria](#)



MYTH #02

“Fibromyalgia Is Just Pain”

FACT

Fibromyalgia Is More Than Chronic Wide-Spread Pain.

The new diagnostic criteria for fibromyalgia give unrefreshed sleep and fatigue a nearly equal weight for diagnosis as pain. There are a variety of other symptoms, which may include, but are not limited to:

- **Cognitive dysfunction (brain fog)**
- **Chronic migraines and tension headaches**
- **Costochondritis (chest wall pain syndrome)**
- **POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome)**
- **IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome)**
- **Sensitivity to environmental factors (including changes in the weather), and**
- **Other symptoms that impair quality of life**
(<https://fibrocanada.ca/200-conditions-symptoms-of-fm/>)

- [Facts and myths pertaining to fibromyalgia](#)
- [Pathophysiology and Clinical Implications of Cognitive Dysfunction in Fibromyalgia](#)
- [One year in review 2020: fibromyalgia](#)



MYTH #03

“Fibromyalgia And Arthritis Are Essentially The Same”

FACT

Although Fibromyalgia And Arthritis Share Certain Symptoms, Including Pain And Exhaustion, They Are Unrelated Conditions With Different Causes.

Fibromyalgia is a condition characterized by generalized pain in muscles and soft tissues without damage to muscles or joints.

Unlike fibromyalgia, arthritis causes inflammation and eventual destruction and wear of the joints. Research states that if you have one of them, you are more likely to have the other.



- [Separating Fibromyalgia From Arthritis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Fibromyalgia](#)



MYTH #04

“People With Fibromyalgia Should Not Exercise”

FACT

Research Has Found Exercise/Movement To Be Effective For Fibromyalgia.

Exercise improves pain, fatigue, balance, and cardiovascular fitness. Exercise stimulates the release of brain neurotransmitters, which are involved in positive ways in fibromyalgia.

Aquatics, qigong, tai chi, yoga, and walking are all proven to be safe and effective forms of exercises which provide health benefits and quality of life to individuals with fibromyalgia.

It's important to pay close attention to engaging in exercises suitable for one's energy level and to pace activities accordingly, as fibromyalgia often results in substantial decreases in energy. Exercise should begin slowly to build up endurance and to support the achievement of exercise goals at a pace that suits each individual. Depending on how physically conditioned the individual is currently, the pace will vary. Exercise therapy has found to be beneficial in chronic pain, but it should be appropriately and individually tailored with emphasis on prevention of symptom flares and applying adequate recovery strategies. Movement brings with it many gains, including lower pain levels and better brain function.

- [Benefits of aquatic exercise in adults with and without chronic disease](#)
- [Impact of water therapy on pain management in patients with fibromyalgia](#)
- [Complementary and alternative exercise for fibromyalgia](#)
- [Effectiveness of Therapeutic Exercise in Fibromyalgia Syndrome](#)
- [Exercise, not to exercise, or how to exercise in patients with chronic pain? Applying science to practice](#)



MYTH #05

*“Fibromyalgia Is A
Psychiatric Illness
/ It’s All In Your
Head”*

FACT

Fibromyalgia Is A Very Real Physical, Chronic Illness That Affects Multiple Systems. It Is A Misconception That Fibromyalgia Is A Made-Up Condition, And/Or That The Person Is A Hypochondriac.

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is not fully understood. Possible genetic disposition, joint hypermobility and other related connective tissue variants may be risk factors in fibromyalgia. Research includes altered central and peripheral nervous system pathways, neuroendocrine and metabolic alterations, as well as links to inflammatory and immune factors. Research has proven through fMRI scans that person's with fibromyalgia, when in pain, the pain perception centres of the brain behave differently than that of someone not in pain.

- [Fibromyalgia Pathogenesis and Treatment Options Update](#)
- [Fibromyalgia: one year in review 2023](#)
- [Fibromyalgia: Pathogenesis, Mechanisms, Diagnosis and Treatment Options Update](#)
- [Facts and myths pertaining to fibromyalgia](#)
- [Alterations of brain activity in fibromyalgia patients](#)



MYTH #06

*“Fibromyalgia Is
A Type Of
Depression”*

FACT

Fibromyalgia And Depression Are NOT The Same Things.

Fibromyalgia and depression, while sharing symptoms like fatigue and cognitive difficulties, are distinct conditions, but the underlying causes are different. However, some people with fibromyalgia may develop depression as a result of living with constant pain and living with a life-altering condition.

Fibromyalgia primarily manifests as widespread pain, exhaustion and brain fog which may be due to alterations in brain activities. Conversely, depression primarily involves mood dysfunction and feelings of worthlessness, rooted in neurotransmitter imbalances and psychological factors.

- [Fibromyalgia and Depression](#)
- [Fibromyalgia and Depression: A Literature Review of Their Shared Aspects](#)
- [Facts and myths pertaining to fibromyalgia](#)



MYTH #07

“You Are Just Tired”

FACT

Fibromyalgia Fatigue Extends Beyond Feeling Tired.

Everyone experiences tiredness at times, which usually refers to short-term lack of energy that gets better with rest or sleep.

People with fibromyalgia experience debilitating fatigue, where tiredness is overwhelming and does not go away with sleep and rest. It can be physical, emotional and/or cognitive fatigue.

Some people describe it as “similar to how healthy people feel when they experience the flu.”



MYTH #08

“There Are Medications To Eliminate The Symptoms Of Fibromyalgia”

FACT

Many People With Fibromyalgia Do Not Benefit From Medications Or Find The Side Effects Out-Weigh The Benefits.

Unfortunately, there is no “magic bullet” drug to eliminate symptoms. Some medications may decrease pain and/or improve sleep thereby improving quality of life. Amitriptyline (Elavil™), duloxetine (Cymbalta™), pregabalin (Lyrica™) and gabapentin (Neurontin™) may provide benefits. They are most effective when combined with non-drug interventions. People are unique and not everyone can tolerate medications.



- [Treatment of fibromyalgia](#)
- [Review of pharmacological therapies in fibromyalgia syndrome \(springer.com\)](#)
- [Fibromyalgia: Presentation and management with a focus on pharmacological treatment](#)
- [Fibromyalgia: Recent Advances in Diagnosis, Classification, Pharmacotherapy and Alternative Remedies \(mdpi.com\)](#)

