

## What is it?



Fibromyalgia (FM) is a long-term (chronic) pain problem. The main symptoms are pain and stiffness throughout the body. The pain and stiffness are worse in the morning. It can take hours before the body loosens up. The pain with FM can be quite variable. It can be aggravated by stress, lack of sleep, physical activity, and the weather. Pain is often worse following activity and can last for days afterwards. Fibromyalgia is also associated with severe fatigue which can be very debilitating.

There are a couple of things to remember about fibromyalgia: (1) It is different for everyone. Everyone experiences FM differently. (2) Every day is different. Some days are good days while others can be difficult (flares).

Believe it or not, there is nothing actually wrong with the muscles or joints, although it can feel that way. Fibromyalgia is thought to happen because the nerves & brain amplify pain signals. Therefore people feel muscle and joint pain when there actually is no tissue damage causing the pain.

The best way to think about Fibromyalgia is that it is a disorder of pain regulation. Your body's 'pain thermostat' is not working properly so that pain sensations are amplified and sensations that are not normally painful hurt.



### **Fibromyalgia is a pain problem. The brain becomes confused and thinks everything is a pain signal. Things that shouldn't be painful are.**

A strange thing was noticed in the first world war. Soldiers who had just lost a leg or an arm were sitting in the hospital tents talking and smoking. They should have had much more pain - think about it - they just lost a limb! However, the brain is smart and when pain strikes the brain sends down special signals to shut off the pain. The problem with fibromyalgia is the brain is constantly bombarded

## What is it going to do to me?



Fibromyalgia is a pain problem. Sometimes FM is confused with arthritis because of the pain and tenderness. FM is not the same as arthritis. Arthritis causes damage and swelling in the joints. FM does not cause physical changes or damage to the joints, muscles or soft tissue.

Fibromyalgia can be more than just pain. People can experience other symptoms including fatigue, difficulty concentrating and remembering, trouble sleeping, and emotional changes. Fibromyalgia is also associated with other conditions including migraine headaches, depression & anxiety, restless leg syndrome, irritable bowel, and irritable bladder.

The cause of the pain from FM isn't visually apparent or obvious. Others might not fully understand or believe what you are going through. This can be frustrating.

The pain and fatigue from FM can limit things you're able to do. Fortunately it doesn't cause long-term damage to joints or other tissues in the body.

with pain. When this occurs the brain loses the ability to send the special signals to shut off the pain. Without these signals the brain becomes confused and starts to think everything is a pain signal. The exact cause of fibromyalgia isn't known. It can come after a physically stressful event (car accident), after an emotionally stressful event (divorce), or after an infection such as a viral illness.

## What can I do about it?



The first thing you should know is FM is real. Seeing a healthcare provider for a condition where there is no obvious damage can be frustrating. Having tests that do not provide answers can be tiring. Remember that fibromyalgia is real, even if it can't be diagnosed by an x-ray or blood test. Who would make this up?

The diagnosis of FM can only be made by a healthcare professional. A thorough assessment and examination including blood tests is usually necessary to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms. Treating FM involves a number of things including the following:

**Education:** Educate yourself about FM and the symptoms associated with it. A very good resource is the website [www.knowfibro.com](http://www.knowfibro.com).

**Therapy:** Cognitive behavioral therapy has been shown to help patients with FM. Discuss with your doctor.

**Exercise:** Daily cardiovascular exercise is an important part of managing FM. Discuss this with your health care provider.

**Sleep:** Difficulty sleeping and not feeling refreshed are troublesome for many people with FM. Learn about ways to improve your sleep and start feeling better.

**Multiple medicines:** These can be prescription or non-prescription. Many medicines can help with sleep, pain, and emotions.

## Visit RheumInfo.com



RheumInfo.com is a free educational website where you can learn more about fibromyalgia and treatments for the disease. The website is operated by Dr. Andy Thompson, a rheumatologist.