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## Fibromyalgia

### What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia (say: fi-bro-my-al-gee-uh) is a disorder that causes pain in your muscles, joints, ligaments and tendons. The pain is especially intense when pressure is applied to areas called “tender points.” Common tender points are the back of the head, the elbows, the shoulders, the knees, the hip joints and around the neck.

Fibromyalgia affects around 2% of the population in the United States. This disorder might be hereditary (which means it runs in families), so you may have family members with similar symptoms. More women than men have fibromyalgia.

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### What are the symptoms of fibromyalgia?

Increased sensitivity to pain is the main symptom of fibromyalgia. Many other symptoms also occur in people with this disorder. Symptoms may come and go.

You may have some degree of constant pain, but the pain may get worse in response to activity, stress, weather changes and other factors. You may have a deep ache or a burning pain. You may have muscle tightening or spasms. Many people have migratory pain (pain that moves around the body).

Most people with fibromyalgia feel tired or fatigued (out of energy). This fatigue may be mild or very severe. You may also have trouble sleeping, which may add to the fatigue.

You may have feelings of numbness or tingling in parts of your body, or a feeling of poor blood flow in some areas. Many people are very sensitive to odors, bright lights, loud noises and even medicines. Headaches and jaw pain are also common.

In addition, you may have dry eyes or difficulty focusing on nearby objects. Problems with dizziness and balance may also occur. Some people have chest pain, a rapid or irregular heartbeat or shortness of breath.

Digestive symptoms are also common in fibromyalgia and include difficulty swallowing, heartburn, gas, cramping abdominal pain and alternating diarrhea and constipation.

Some people have urinary complaints, including frequent urination, a strong urge to urinate and pain in the bladder area. Women who have fibromyalgia often have pelvic symptoms, including pelvic pain, painful menstrual periods and painful sexual intercourse.

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### Why do I feel depressed?

Depression or anxiety may occur as a result of your constant pain and fatigue, or the frustration you feel with the condition. It is also possible that the same chemical imbalances in the brain that cause mood changes also contribute to fibromyalgia.

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## **Does fibromyalgia cause permanent damage?**

No. Although fibromyalgia causes symptoms that can be very painful and uncomfortable, your muscles and organs are not being damaged. This condition is not life-threatening, but it is chronic (ongoing). Although there is no cure, there are many things you can do to feel better.

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## **Is there any medicine I can take to help my symptoms?**

Several medicines can help reduce the symptoms of fibromyalgia. Many of these medicines are taken before bedtime and help reduce pain and improve sleep.

Your doctor may recommend treating your symptoms with acetaminophen (one brand: Tylenol) first. He or she may also prescribe another medicine for you to take, including tramadol, duloxetine, milnacipran and pregabalin. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (which include ibuprofen, aspirin and naproxen) are not usually effective in treating fibromyalgia when taken alone.

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## **What else can I do to relieve my symptoms?**

One of the best things you can do for fibromyalgia is low-impact aerobic exercise. Examples of this type of exercise include swimming or water exercise, stationary bicycling and exercising on ski-type machines. You may need to begin at a very low level of exercise (5 minutes every day is helpful at first). Continue to increase the length and frequency of exercise until you are exercising for at least 30 to 60 minutes 3 to 4 times a week. Once you reach this point, you can consider switching to higher-impact exercises, like walking, jogging and tennis.

Because the symptoms of fibromyalgia are made worse by stress and poor sleep, it is important to cut stress out of your life whenever possible and to get as much sleep as you need. Since alcohol and caffeine can contribute to poor sleep, avoid these substances around bedtime.

Other simple lifestyle changes may be helpful. For example, try keeping your activity level the same each day. Many people who have fibromyalgia try to do as much as possible on "good" days, which leads them to have several "bad" days. If you keep your activity level even, you may not have as many "bad" days. Many people find that a routine time to eat, sleep and exercise helps to ease their symptoms.

If you also have depression or are very frustrated with your condition, talk with your doctor. He or she may refer you to a therapist that can help you deal with your feelings about your disease.

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## **Other Organizations**

- [Fibromyalgia Network](http://www.fmnetnews.com)  
<http://www.fmnetnews.com>
- [Arthritis Foundation](#)

<http://www.arthritis.org>

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## Source

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