



Fact Sheet

## Fibromyalgia Pain

### About

Fibromyalgia is a common and chronic disorder characterized by widespread muscle pain, fatigue, and multiple tender points. The word “fibromyalgia” comes from the Latin term for fibrous tissue (fibro) and the Greek terms for muscle (myo) and pain (algia). Tender points are specific places on the body—on the neck, shoulders, back, hips, and upper and lower extremities—where people with fibromyalgia feel pain in response to slight pressure.

“Fibromyalgia affects an estimate of 5 million Americans.<sup>1</sup>”

Although fibromyalgia is often considered an arthritis-related condition, it is not truly a form of arthritis (a disease of the joints) because it does not cause inflammation or damage to the joints, muscles, or

other tissues. Like arthritis, however, fibromyalgia can cause significant pain and fatigue, and it can interfere with a person’s ability to carry on daily activities. Also like arthritis, fibromyalgia is considered a rheumatic condition, a medical condition that impairs the joints and/or soft tissues and causes chronic pain.<sup>1</sup>

Fibromyalgia has been called an invisible illness, often denied or misunderstood. Because patients with the syndrome do not “look sick,” they are often treated without empathy by clinicians, family, and friends. This situation can lead over time to self-doubt and diminished self-esteem.<sup>2</sup>

### Facts

Estimates for the prevalence of fibromyalgia vary greatly. According to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Disorders (NIAMS), fibromyalgia affects an estimate of 5 million Americans.<sup>1</sup>

However, the National Fibromyalgia Association estimates that fibromyalgia impacts an estimated 10 million Americans.<sup>3</sup> The American Pain Society estimates that 8 to 12 million Americans have fibromyalgia. Prevalence of fibromyalgia increases with age, reaching an estimated 7% in women 60-79 years old.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to pain and fatigue, people who have fibromyalgia may experience a variety of other symptoms including:<sup>5</sup>

- cognitive and memory problems (sometimes referred to as “fibro fog”)
- sleep disturbances
- morning stiffness
- headaches
- irritable bowel syndrome
- painful menstrual periods
- numbness or tingling of the extremities
- restless legs syndrome
- temperature sensitivity
- sensitivity to loud noises or bright lights.

One study showed a small but significant relationship among pain, fatigue, and emotional distress associated with fibromyalgia. The findings showed that emotional stress and pain may increase fatigue, fatigue but not emotional distress may increase pain, and pain but not fatigue may increase emotional distress.<sup>6</sup>

For unknown reasons, between 80 and 90% of those diagnosed with fibromyalgia are women; however, men and children also can be affected. Most people are diagnosed during middle age, although the symptoms often become present earlier in life.<sup>1</sup>

A 2011 online survey conducted by the American Pain Foundation and the National Fibromyalgia Association of 3,018 people living with diagnosed or undiagnosed fibromyalgia or other chronic pain conditions (2,559 people diagnosed with fibromyalgia) found the following:<sup>7</sup>

- Almost 9 in 10 respondents (approximately 87%) felt they were no longer the person they were before they started living with chronic pain; daily household and childcare needs, enjoying their children’s milestones or managing their children’s activities/scheduling;
- Nearly all respondents (92%) reported their condition has had a significant impact on major life decisions, including whether to initiate or remain in a relationship, change jobs and/or have children;
- Of the more than 650 respondents who had children currently under the age of 18, 95% reported that their pain condition affects at least one of their parenting duties, such as taking care of
- Approximately 7 in 10 survey respondents (68%) agreed that pain limits their ability to care for their family;
- Nearly all respondents (approximately 98%) reported they have implemented some type of adaptation to their daily routine in order to conduct activities and tasks; three quarters of respondents have made three or more daily adjustments.

Obesity may be interrelated to fibromyalgia pain, disability, and sleep. Researchers have found that obesity is common in fibromyalgia. Approximately half of the patients in one study were obese and an additional 30% were overweight. The study found that obesity in FMS was associated with greater pain sensitivity, poorer sleep quality, and reduced physical strength and flexibility.<sup>8</sup>

A diagnosis of fibromyalgia overlaps with many other chronic pain syndromes, including chronic widespread pain, irritable bowel syndrome, temporomandibular disorders, and low-back pain. As these pain syndromes lack characteristic features, these conditions have been labeled pain hypersensitivity syndromes. These pain syndromes, including FM and chronic fatigue syndrome, are often associated with affective spectrum disorders, particularly depression and anxiety. Overall, the hallmarks of all these syndromes are chronic widespread pain, distress, dysfunctional pain modulation, and central sensitization.<sup>9</sup>

The **National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Disease (NIAMS)**

sponsors research that will improve scientists' understanding of the specific problems that cause or accompany fibromyalgia, in turn helping them develop better ways to diagnose, treat, and prevent this syndrome. The research on fibromyalgia supported by NIAMS covers a broad spectrum, ranging from basic laboratory research to studies of medications and interventions designed to encourage behaviors that reduce pain and change behaviors that worsen or perpetuate pain.<sup>1</sup>

- **Understanding pain.** Research suggests that fibromyalgia is caused by a problem in how the body processes pain, or more precisely, a hypersensitivity to stimuli that normally are not painful. Therefore, several NIH-supported researchers are focusing on ways the body processes pain to better understand why people with fibromyalgia have increased pain sensitivity.
- **Improving Symptoms.** A better understanding of fibromyalgia and the mechanisms involved in chronic pain are enabling researchers to find effective treatments for it.
- **Increasing exercise.** Although fibromyalgia is often associated with fatigue that makes exercise difficult, regular exercise has been shown to be one of the most beneficial treatments for the condition.
- **Improving sleep.** Researchers supported by NIAMS are investigating ways to improve sleep for people with fibromyalgia whose sleep problems persist despite treatment with medications.

# Additional Resources

## **Advocates for Fibromyalgia Funding, Treatment, Education, and Research**

P.O. Box 768  
Libertyville, IL 60048-0768  
Phone: (847) 362-7807  
Fax: (847) 680-3922  
E-mail: [info@affter.org](mailto:info@affter.org)  
[www.affter.org](http://www.affter.org)

## **American College of Rheumatology**

2200 Lake Boulevard NE  
Atlanta, GA 30319  
Phone: (404) 633-3777  
Fax: (404) 633-1870  
E-mail: [acr@rheumatology.org](mailto:acr@rheumatology.org)  
[www.rheumatology.org](http://www.rheumatology.org)

## **American Pain Society**

4700 West Lake Avenue  
Glenview, IL 60025  
Phone: (847) 375-4715  
Fax: (866) 574-2654, (847) 375-6479  
[www.ampainsoc.org](http://www.ampainsoc.org)

## **National Fibromyalgia Association**

2121 S. Towne Center Place, Suite 300  
Anaheim, CA 92806  
Phone: (714) 921-0150  
Fax: (714) 921-6920  
E-mail: [nfa@fmaware.org](mailto:nfa@fmaware.org)  
[www.fmaware.org/site/PageServer.html](http://www.fmaware.org/site/PageServer.html)

## **National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Disease (NIAMS)**

1 AMS Circle  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3675  
Phone: 301-495-4484  
Toll Free: 877-22-NIAMS (877-226-4267)  
TTY: 301-565-2966  
Fax: 301-718-6366  
Email: [NIAMInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMInfo@mail.nih.gov)  
[www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)

## **American Chronic Pain Association**

P.O. Box 850  
Rocklin, CA 95677  
Phone: (800) 533-3231  
Fax: (916) 632-3208  
E-mail: [ACPA@pacbell.net](mailto:ACPA@pacbell.net)  
[www.theacpa.org](http://www.theacpa.org)

## **American Pain Foundation**

201 N. Charles Street, Suite 710  
Baltimore, MD 21201-4111  
Phone: (888) 615-PAIN (7246)  
E-mail: [info@painfoundation.org](mailto:info@painfoundation.org)  
[www.painfoundation.org](http://www.painfoundation.org)

## **Fibromyalgia Network**

P.O. Box 31750  
Tucson, AZ 85751-1750  
Phone: (800) 853-2929  
Phone: (520) 290-5508  
Fax: (520) 290-5550  
E-mail: [inquiry@fmnetnews.com](mailto:inquiry@fmnetnews.com)  
[www.fmnetnews.com](http://www.fmnetnews.com)

## **National Fibromyalgia & Chronic Pain Association**

31 Federal Ave.  
Logan, UT 84321  
[www.fmcpaware.org](http://www.fmcpaware.org)

## **P.A.N.D.O.R.A.**

### **Patient Alliance for Neuroendocrine-immune Disorders and Organization for Research and Advocacy**

255 Alhambra Circle, Suite 715  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134  
Volunteer help line: (954) 783-6771  
[www.pandoranet.info](http://www.pandoranet.info)

Resources verified July 2011.

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