

# PAIN RELIEF FOUNDATION

[www.painreliefoundation.org.uk](http://www.painreliefoundation.org.uk)

## FIBROMYALGIA

### WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

- Fibromyalgia (FM) is the name given to a particular group of symptoms. It is a chronic pain syndrome and is sometimes called Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS).
- Fibromyalgia is a common condition. It is estimated that between 4% and 20% of people have it. It is more common in women of childbearing age. The condition is long lasting, often for many years.
- The symptoms include widespread muscle pain, above and below the waist and on both sides of the body, together with stiffness and debilitating tiredness. The condition is associated with tender points throughout the body, which hurt when pressed. Pain is often felt in the neck, shoulders, back and hips. The pain is not caused by damage to the muscles.
- There is often increased sensitivity to normal things such as light touch, draughts, or clothing, which is felt as pain.
- Sleep disturbance is characteristic of the condition. Sleep is not refreshing and there is muscle stiffness on waking.
- Depression is common in Fibromyalgia.
- Other symptoms are common such as headaches, irritable bowel, restless legs (with numbness, tingling, or itching), and intolerance of cold.
- The condition can be disabling and affects all aspects of peoples' lives, including being unable to function normally, or to work.

### DIAGNOSIS

- There are no specific tests for fibromyalgia and nothing is visible on X-rays or scans.
- After looking at your detailed medical history, your doctor will look for symptoms, which indicate that you have fibromyalgia. These include widespread pain for longer than 3 months and painful tender points, together with any history of stress or depression.
- You may be referred to a Rheumatologist, (a specialist in rheumatic and arthritic disorders). He can carry out tests to check that you do not have a rheumatic disease. You may also be referred to a pain clinic, where specialist pain doctors can diagnose the condition and offer the treatments mentioned in this leaflet. There are no other treatments available, even from a pain clinic.

### WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

- The cause of fibromyalgia is not known.
- It may start after an accident, an infection or a stressful life event. It may also begin for no particular reason.
- Doctors have some theories about what may cause the condition. Your nervous system may have become over sensitive to normal aches and other sensations such as touch and cold, which the brain registers as pain.
- Because you have pain and tiredness, your activities decrease. This leads to deconditioning of the body and you may then become depressed. This becomes a vicious cycle of pain, tiredness and depression.

### TREATMENT

- There is no cure for fibromyalgia. Treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms and managing the condition. A positive practical approach to coping with the symptoms will help.

### DRUGS

- Everyday painkillers such as paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine may help.

- Drugs normally used to treat depression (antidepressants), such as amitriptyline and nortriptyline, and newer types of antidepressants such as duloxetine, can also partly relieve pain and help restore sleep, in some cases. These drugs may cause side effects. You may experience dry mouth, drowsiness, constipation or nausea. These drugs are therefore not suitable for everyone, but it may be possible to get the right balance between side effects and benefit. These drugs must be taken regularly for them to work.
- There is evidence that in some cases stronger painkillers such as tramadol can help. Morphine like drugs may also help some people, but there is no evidence for this treatment.

### REHABILITATION

- The most useful treatment is a programme of exercise and relaxation to re-condition the body. Stretching exercises and gentle aerobic exercise such as yoga, walking and swimming (in warm water), are all helpful. Obesity is often associated with fibromyalgia and losing weight in these cases will help.
- Heat treatments such as warm showers, baths or hot water bottles can help. Massage and relaxation can all help to relieve the symptoms.
- A holistic approach to treatment is helpful, including treating any distress. Reducing stress levels and learning to cope with problems will reduce the impact of your symptoms. Education about pain, its causes or lack of them, and the effect it has on you will help you to understand and cope with the condition.

### PAIN CLINICS & PAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES

- Pain clinics can offer you the treatments mentioned in this leaflet, but as yet there are no other treatments available, even from a pain clinic.
- You may be suitable for referral to a pain management programme which will teach you graded exercises to do at home, deep muscular relaxation and pacing activity. It is important to keep active on 'bad' days and not to overdo it on 'good' days. The programme will help you to understand the impact of chronic pain on you and your family. Pain management programmes will not cure fibromyalgia or relieve the pain. They should,

### WHERE TO GET HELP AND SUPPORT

**Fibromyalgia Association UK** <http://www.fmauk.org>  
National Helpline 0300 999 3333

**The British Pain Society**, [www.britishpainsociety.org](http://www.britishpainsociety.org) 3rd Floor, Churchill House, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG. Tel. 0207 269 7840  
Can provide a booklet "Understanding and Managing Pain: Information for Patients."

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**The Pain Relief Foundation is a registered charity. If you found this leaflet useful please consider donating to the Foundation. Every donation helps to fund research into the treatment of chronic pain conditions.**

Copies of this leaflet are available from The Pain Relief Foundation, Clinical Sciences Centre, University Hospital Aintree, Lower Lane, Liverpool L9 7AL, UK. Registered Charity No. 1156227, Tel. 0151 529 5820, Fax. 0151 529 5821,  
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Over-the-counter medicines for pain		
Drugs for nerve pain		

Disclaimer: If you have a pain problem which needs treatment you must contact your own doctor. He can refer you to a pain clinic in your area. This leaflet is for information only and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your doctor. The Pain Relief Foundation cannot offer individual medical advice.

