

Understanding Fibromyalgia

What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a chronic primary pain syndrome affecting muscles and other soft tissues in the body.

The term comes from:

- Fibro – Fibrous tissues
- Myo – Muscles
- Algia – Pain

More than just pain, Fibromyalgia is a syndrome, meaning it is defined by the presence of multiple symptoms appearing together and lasting a long time.

7 common symptoms

Although you may experience many other symptoms, these 7 are the main ones:

- Body-wide chronic pain
- Persistent fatigue
- Memory and concentration problems (“Fibrofog”)
- Unrefreshing sleep
- Abdominal discomfort
- Low or negative mood
- Tension headaches

Diagnosing Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia doesn’t show up in lab tests or on scans and, these days, scoring ‘tender points’ is considered unnecessary.

Instead, doctors can diagnose Fibromyalgia based on your symptom patterns and medical history, and you may complete a screening questionnaire. Other conditions with similar symptoms may also need to be excluded.

[Do our symptoms quiz!](#)

Causes & contributors

Fibromyalgia results from potentially-reversible changes in multiple bodily systems, rather than permanent damage.

Possible contributors include:

- Genetic predisposition (e.g. joint hypermobility)
- Physical stressors (e.g. infection, injury, aging)
- Psychological stressors (e.g. trauma, chronic stress)
- Hormonal changes (e.g. perimenopause)

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The science behind Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia involves dysregulation of several interconnected bodily systems:

- Central Nervous System (CNS) – chronic sensitization of your CNS means signals from your body are amplified and your system overreacts with pain.
- Neuroimmune system – heightened immune responses lead to increased sensitivity to foods, chemicals and infections. (But Fibromyalgia is not considered an inflammatory or autoimmune condition)
- Stress-response system – an overactive fight-or-flight mode affects your sleep, gives you that anxious feeling, wears you out, and affects your weight management.
- Gut microbiome – changes in your gut microbiota lead to abdominal discomfort and digestive disturbances but also disrupt gut production of feel-good chemicals (like serotonin) and your immunity.
- Endocrine System – imbalances between key stress and sex hormones make managing pain, stress, sleep, and weight and other lifestyle factors hard.

Impact on daily life

Fibromyalgia symptoms can affect sleep, movement, social interactions, and overall well-being. Many people with Fibromyalgia avoid activities due to pain, fear, sensory overload or fatigue. Work performance may also suffer – impacting on job security.

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Management

Fibromyalgia is not a disease so it has no single cause or cure. Medications have also proven of little benefit. Rather, research shows that support from a multidisciplinary team to use non-medication strategies and lifestyle changes work best for resetting your dysregulated bodily systems.