

## What Is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia (fy-bro-my-AL-juh), or FM for short, is a complex, chronic condition which causes widespread pain in the body's muscles, tendons, ligaments, and other soft tissues. Unlike arthritis, the joints are not directly affected in fibromyalgia. The pain of FM is often described as aching or burning and is unpredictable in nature. Its severity varies from day to day, and different parts of the body tend to be affected at different times. FM pain can be extremely severe and disabling, or it may cause only moderate discomfort. Despite its many symptoms and their potential severity, FM does not cause physical deformity nor interfere with normal life expectancy. However, it can be a very challenging disorder, and until the patient is able to manage it through appropriate treatment(s) and medication, FM can adversely affect quality of life.

### Symptoms Of Fibromyalgia

In addition to pain, the following symptoms may accompany FM:

**Fatigue** – ranging from a “tired” feeling to an all-consuming exhaustion.

**Unrefreshed Sleep** – despite getting adequate sleep. Also difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.

**Stiffness** – upon awakening or after remaining in one position for a prolonged period. May also accompany weather changes.

**Headaches** – often the result of extremely tight or overworked neck and shoulder muscles that refer pain upwards. May also be caused by a localized neuromuscular condition known as myofascial pain syndrome found in many FM patients in which very painful spots (trigger points) form in taut bands in muscles or other connective tissues.

**Light-headedness/Balance Problems** – usually involve a difficulty with balance (particularly while standing) or with visual tracking/orientation when engaged in activities which require a lot of eye movement. They may also be a result of temporomandibular (jaw) joint (TMJ) dysfunction, a condition quite common in FM.

**Abdominal Discomfort** – abdominal pain and bloating, constipation, and/or diarrhea (also known as irritable bowel syndrome).

**Pelvic Pain/Discomfort** – may include an increase in urinary frequency or a greater urgency to urinate, often without infection (irritable bladder), or in some patients, interstitial cystitis, a chronic, inflammatory condition of the bladder wall. Gynecological symptoms may include pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), painful menstruation, vulvar vestibulitis, and/or vulvodynia.

**Numbness or Tingling** – a prickling or burning sensation, particularly in the arms or legs (paresthesia).

**Chest Wall Pain** – intense muscular pain at the spot where the ribs meet the chest bone, accompanied by shallow breathing (also known as costochondralgia or costochondritis).

**Cognitive Disorders** – consists of difficulty concentrating, “spaciness”, memory lapses, word mix-ups when speaking or writing, and clumsiness (“fibro-fog”).

**Sensory Sensitivity** – hypersensitivity to light, noise, touch, and odors as well as cold or heat. Allergic-like symptoms (i.e., rhinitis, itching, rash, etc.) may also occur.

**Emotional Responses** – irritability, anxiety, depression, and/or feelings of isolation are not uncommon because of the chronic and unpredictable nature of fibromyalgia.

## Puzzled About Fibromyalgia?



**National Fibromyalgia  
Partnership, Inc. (NFP)**

[www.fmpartnership.org](http://www.fmpartnership.org)

### Who Develops FM?

Fibromyalgia affects a significant segment of the population. According to conservative estimates, between 4 and 6 million Americans have FM, more than those with rheumatoid arthritis. Some experts believe that the true number is closer to 10 million. An estimated 80% of sufferers are women, most of them working-age, so FM has obvious consequences for employment and increased

family stress. Fibromyalgia also occurs in all other age groups and in men, and it exists in all races worldwide.

## What Have Researchers Learned?

At one time, fibromyalgia was thought to be a disease of the muscles and soft tissues. However, recent research has documented abnormalities in the brain and central nervous system in FM patients (i.e., abnormalities in the levels of certain neurochemicals and in the functioning of the pain processing systems as well as the neuroendocrine and sympathetic nervous systems) making it clear that FM is a centrally mediated condition rather than one originating in the periphery. FM can be triggered in pre-disposed individuals by a traumatic injury to the body or brain (i.e., a vehicular accident or fall), a severe illness or surgery, or acute emotional stress. Although genetic research is just beginning, there is already evidence that FM runs in some families.

## Diagnosis & Treatment

Because no simple lab test is currently available, FM diagnosis requires a “hands on” evaluation by a skilled medical professional. This evaluation usually consists of: (1) ruling out medical conditions whose symptoms mimic FM (i.e., thyroid disease, MS, lupus, etc.); (2) an extensive medical history which includes a discussion of the nature and duration of specific symptoms; and (3) a physical examination which includes a “tender point” exam – the application of pressure to specific anatomical points known to be especially sensitive in fibromyalgia patients.

There is currently no cure for FM, so treatment consists of managing symptoms as much as possible. Among the most helpful approaches, used alone or in combination, are: medications; physical therapy; gentle, low-impact exercise; and alternative approaches such as acupuncture, EEG-driven neurotherapy, relaxation therapy, osteopathy, and nutritional counseling. Detailed information on treatment and research can be found in NFP publications.

### National Fibromyalgia Partnership (NFP)

P.O. Box 160  
Linden, VA 22642-0160

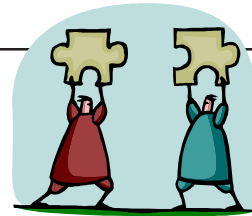
FM Resource Center: 866/725-4404 (toll-free)

Fax: 866/666-2727 (toll-free)

Website: [www.fmpartnership.org](http://www.fmpartnership.org)

Email: [mail@fmpartnership.org](mailto:mail@fmpartnership.org)

For a free copy of our catalog of publications and tapes, contact the NFP, or visit our website's Online Store.



## Why You Should Become A Member of the National Fibromyalgia Partnership

Whether you are a patient or a medical professional, membership in the National Fibromyalgia Partnership (NFP) is the best way for you to stay informed about new findings re: fibromyalgia treatment and research. You can be assured of getting reliable and accurate information. NFP staff carefully track newly reported research and regularly travel to professional conferences to hear presentations by leading experts in the field. Thanks to our location in the Washington, DC, metro area, we also have access to the National Institutes of Health, the national headquarters of many health organizations, and leading university research centers.

Membership also provides you with a steady supply of resource information which can help improve your quality of life and allow you to become a better health care consumer. Learn about organizations which provide useful services for people with fibromyalgia; find out how to save money on medications and other health products; learn what's useful on the internet (and what's not!).

With a NFP tax-deductible membership, you receive a comprehensive New Member Packet containing information on fibromyalgia as well as a variety of resource materials. You also receive a one-year subscription to the NFP's popular quarterly journal, *Fibromyalgia Frontiers*, which is packed with articles, news, and medically-accurate information in easy-to-understand language. As a member, you are also entitled to discounts on NFP products and programming.

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**Membership: \$25/yr. (North America) or \$30/yr. (all other countries). Make checks/money order payable to "NFP, Inc." (U.S. dollars only, please). Visa and Mastercard also accepted (send acct. #, exp. date, cardholder name, and signature).**