

Fibromyalgia

Overview, Symptoms, & Causes

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Overview of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a chronic (long-lasting) disorder that causes pain and tenderness throughout the body, as well as fatigue and trouble sleeping. Scientists do not fully understand what causes it, but people with the disorder have an increased sensitivity to pain.

There is no cure for fibromyalgia, but doctors and other health care providers can help manage and treat the symptoms. Treatment typically involves a combination of exercise or other movement therapies, psychological and behavioral therapy, and medications.

Who Gets Fibromyalgia?

Anyone can get fibromyalgia, but more women get it than men. It can affect people of any age, even children, but it usually starts in middle age, and the chance of having it increases as you get older. It occurs in people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

If you have other diseases, especially rheumatic diseases, mood disorders, or conditions that cause pain, you may be more likely to have fibromyalgia. These diseases include:

- [Rheumatoid arthritis](#).
- [Systemic lupus erythematosus](#) (commonly called lupus).

- [Ankylosing spondylitis](#).
- [Osteoarthritis](#).
- Depression or anxiety.
- Chronic [back pain](#).
- Irritable bowel syndrome.

Fibromyalgia tends to run in families, and some scientists believe that certain genes could make you more likely to develop it. However, the disorder also occurs in people with no family history of the disorder.

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

The main symptoms of fibromyalgia are:

- Chronic, widespread pain throughout the body or in multiple areas. Pain is often felt in the arms, legs, head, chest, abdomen, back, and buttocks. People often describe it as aching, burning, or throbbing.
- Fatigue or an overwhelming feeling of being tired.
- Trouble sleeping.

Other symptoms may include:

- Muscle and joint stiffness.
- Tenderness to touch.
- Numbness or tingling in the arms and legs.
- Problems with concentrating, thinking clearly, and memory (sometimes called "fibro fog").
- Increased sensitivity to light, noise, odors, and temperature.
- Digestive issues, such as bloating or constipation.

Causes of Fibromyalgia

The cause of fibromyalgia is not known, but studies show that people with the disorder have an increased sensitivity to pain, so they feel pain when others do not. Brain imaging studies and other research have uncovered evidence of altered signaling in neural pathways that transmit and receive pain in people with fibromyalgia. These changes may also contribute to the fatigue, sleep troubles, and "fibro fog" issues that many people with the disorder experience.

Fibromyalgia tends to run in families, so genetic factors are likely to contribute to the disorder, but little is known for sure about the specific genes involved. Researchers believe that environmental (nongenetic) factors also play a role in a person's risk of developing the disorder. These environmental triggers may include having a disease that causes pain, such as rheumatoid arthritis, or mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression.