

Fibromyalgia Syndrome

"The Chronic Invisible Illness"

What is Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS)?

It is a common form of generalized muscular pain and fatigue. Fibromyalgia means pain in the muscles and in the tissues that connect bones, ligaments, and tendons. It is often described as **fatigue stiffness**, and widespread musculoskeletal pain that varies in type and intensity. FMS is not an inflammatory condition.

Who is affected by FMS?

Approximately 2 to 4 percent of the U.S. population is believed to be affected by fibromyalgia syndrome, with women sufferers outnumbering men by a ratio of 10:1. The women affected are between ages 20 to 60, and most are between the ages of 45 to 55.

What are the signs and symptoms of FMS?

The most prominent symptom is widespread musculoskeletal pain. The pain usually starts in one region and may spread over a period of time. Fibromyalgia pain has been described in a variety of ways, such as burning, gnawing, aching, or as stiffness or soreness. It often varies according to time of the day, activity level, weather, sleep patterns, and stress. Other symptoms include sleep disturbances, fatigue, headaches, mood changes, abdominal pain, bloating, and irritable bowel syndrome.

How is FMS diagnosed?

Fibromyalgia is diagnosed by the presence of widespread muscle pain in combination with tenderness at most of the trigger points. Trigger points are located on the back of the head, base of the neck, between the shoulders, under the shoulder blades, on top of the buttocks, inside of the knees, and outside the elbow joint. These points must be extremely painful even to slight pressure.

What causes FMS?

No one knows what causes fibromyalgia.

How is FMS treated?

Treatment plans vary from person to person. Treatment options include medications to diminish pain and improve sleep, exercise programs that stretch muscles and improve cardiovascular fitness, relaxation techniques to ease muscle tension and anxiety, and/or educational programs to help you understand and manage fibromyalgia.

How can people with FMS help manage their illness?

- **Aerobic exercise programs** can increase endurance and decrease pain. Low or non-impact aerobic exercises such as **walking, biking, water aerobics** or **swimming** are the best ways to start such a program. Exercise every other day. **Gently** stretch your muscles and move your joints through their range of motion daily.
- Have a **consistent bedtime** with **adequate amounts of sleep**. Use **stress management techniques** such as alternating periods of activity with periods of rest and breathing exercises. This can help you control your feelings.

Health Tips

- **Watch your diet.**
- **Avoid the following:**
 1. alcohol
 2. caffeine
 3. coffee
 4. nuts
 5. tea
 6. citrus
 7. carbonated beverages
 8. sugar
 9. white flour
 10. monosodium glutamate
 11. dairy
- **Eat more of the following:**
 1. barley
 2. buckwheat
 3. dark leafy greens
 4. fish
 5. fruit (except citrus)
 6. legumes
 7. oats
 8. vegetables

ATTENTION: This web page is intended to be used for health information ONLY. If you or a family member has a medical emergency, please call your doctor or 911, or your local emergency service number.

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