

Fibromyalgia (pronounced fye-bro-mye-AL-ja), is a chronic condition characterised by widespread aches and pains, and involves specific tender points on places such as neck, shoulders, back, hips, arms and legs which hurt when pressure is applied to them.

What are the usual symptoms?

- ∂ Widespread pain lasting more than three months, experienced on both sides of the body, both above and below the waist
- ∂ Pain in specific tender points
- ∂ Ongoing fatigue, that does not get better with sleep or rest
- ∂ Cognitive and memory problems sometimes called ‘fibro fog’
- ∂ Trouble sleeping, sometimes associated with restless legs syndrome
- ∂ Morning stiffness
- ∂ Muscle fatigue, causing twitching or cramps
- ∂ Headaches
- ∂ Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- ∂ Painful periods
- ∂ Numbness or tingling of hands or feet
- ∂ Temperature sensitivity such as ‘feeling the cold’
- ∂ Sensitivity to loud noises or bright lights

Symptoms can mimic and overlap with other conditions such as lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), MS, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) or sleep apnoea.

Causes

While fibromyalgia can occur by itself, it is often found in women with other conditions such as lupus and arthritis (particularly rheumatoid arthritis), as well as those with exposure to stressful or traumatic events (such as car accidents), infections, illnesses and repetitive injuries.

Risk factors

These factors are associated with a higher risk of fibromyalgia:

- ∂ **Gender:** 90% of patients are women.
- ∂ **Family History** of fibromyalgia.
- ∂ **Stressful or Traumatic Events:** such as car accidents, infections, illness or repetitive injuries as well as emotional stress or trauma.

Impacts

Fibromyalgia can result in wide impacts, including:

- **Lower quality of life**, sometimes compounded by **inability to work or study**.
- **Emotional troubles**: Chronic pain and interrupted sleep may cause emotional stress and may lead to depression.

What should I do if I think I have Fibromyalgia?

Use this quiz to help you decide if you need to seek medical advice:

- Have you had widespread pain lasting more than three months? The pain may be felt more in muscles you use most often such as back or legs, and may be a deep muscle ache or may throb or burn.
- Do you have ongoing fatigue that does not improve with sleep or rest?
- Do you commonly have problems sleeping?
- Do you wake in the morning feeling stiff?
- Are you unusually forgetful or feel you are in a cognitive fog?

If you're experiencing these sorts of symptoms affecting your daily life, take this checklist to your GP to discuss getting tested for fibromyalgia.

What can help?

Fibromyalgia can be difficult to treat, often requiring a team approach perhaps including a rheumatology or pain clinic. Many lifestyle changes can be helpful such as regular exercise, holistic pain, stress and sleep management, psychological support such as talk therapies and support groups, and complementary therapies and strategies such as acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, relaxation and breathing exercises.

Suggested Resources:

- The fibromyalgia articles found by searching www.WomensHealth.gov.
- Information and support from Arthritis NZ: www.Arthritis.org.nz
- Information and support from MS Waikato: www.MSWaikato.org.nz/ME.asp
Contact their Support Co-ordinator Tracey Larsen (ph 07 8344745)
- See also the Insight Endometriosis fact sheet on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Source: Adapted from information from the WomensHealth.gov website

For more information: visit www.InsightEndometriosis.org.nz or [www.Facebook.com/InsightEndometriosis](https://www.facebook.com/InsightEndometriosis) or contact our Educator, Annette ph 07 8555 123 | email info@InsightEndometriosis.org.nz | FB message.
