

Fibromyalgia / Widespread Myofascial Pain

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, or CFS is like Fibromyalgia Syndrome.
The information in this handout can be applied to you if you have CFS.

What is Fibromyalgia Syndrome, or FMS?

FMS is a condition in which the patient complains of:

- fatigue or being tired a lot of the time
- general pain that is all over the joints, bones and muscles
- many tender points. Tender points are focal areas of tenderness, that are usually in the neck, spine, shoulders and hips.

FMS is a chronic condition which means that it is present for a long time. The impact of having FMS on daily life varies from person to person. How much pain and fatigue you will have also varies. There may be days that you feel well enough to do your activities, but there may be times when you need to rest all day.

How do you feel if you have FMS?

People with FMS often say they ache all over. Their muscles may feel like they have been pulled or overworked. Sometimes the muscles twitch and at other times they burn.

To help your family and friends understand FMS, have them think back to the last time they had a bad flu. Every muscle in their body shouts out in pain. Plus, they have no energy - their power supply is unplugged.

An organization called The Fibromyalgia Network talks about FMS with respect to these symptoms:

- pain
 - fatigue
 - sleeping
 - your bowels
 - headaches
 - jaw pain
 - chemical sensitivities
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Pain

There is no one way to describe the pain. You may describe the pain as deep muscular aching, burning, throbbing, shooting and stabbing. The pain and stiffness may be worse in the morning. You may hurt more in muscles that you use a lot. You may have some numbness and tingling in joints or muscles.

Fatigue

Fatigue or feeling very tired varies from person to person. In some it is mild, while in others it is severe. The fatigue has been described as "brain fatigue" in which patients feel totally drained of energy. Many patients describe feeling as if their arms and legs are tied to concrete blocks, and they cannot concentrate.

Sleeping

Research shows that persons with FMS can often fall asleep without much trouble, but their deep level sleep may be interrupted by bursts of awake-like brain activity. It may seem like you may spend the night with one foot in sleep and the other one out of it. You wake up, feel like you have been run over by a truck and are very tired all day long.

Other possible sleep problems with FMS include:

- sleep myoclonus which is nighttime jerking of the arms and legs
- restless leg syndrome
- bruxism or teeth grinding

The sleeping problems that occur with FMS are thought to be a major contributing factor to the symptoms of FMS.

Bowel and stomach problems

Many people with FMS have:

- constipation
- diarrhea
- frequent abdominal pain
- bloating and gas
- nausea

Headaches

Repeated migraine or tension-type headaches are common in about half of people with FMS.

Jaw pain

Many people with FMS have jaw pain or Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Syndrome, or TMJD. TMJD may also include face and head pain.

Chemical sensitivities

About half of people with FMS are sensitive to odors, noise, bright lights, medications and certain foods.

Other common symptoms

- painful menstrual periods
- chest pain
- memory problems
- frequent need to urinate
- the feeling of swollen arms and legs
- dry eyes and mouth
- frequent changes in eye prescription
- dizziness
- coordination or balance is off

Factors which may cause FMS to feel worse

- changes in weather, cold or drafty environments
- hormonal changes
- stress, depression, and anxiety
- doing too much and not getting enough rest

What causes FMS?

We do not know the cause of FMS. FMS may be caused by:

- a change in the built in pain management system of the body
- contact with a virus or a viral infection
- an injury or some type of trauma such as a car accident
- development of another condition such as rheumatoid arthritis, or lupus
- changes in how your muscles work

These events probably do not cause FMS, but react to something in your body which does. There may be a genetic link to having FMS.

How do I know if I have FMS?

It is very hard for your doctor to diagnosis or figure out if you have FMS. FMS is diagnosed based on your clinical history (your symptoms and physical exam).

Many of the symptoms of FMS are found in other conditions and it is important to ensure that treatable conditions are identified. Your doctor will talk with you about your health. He or she may examine you and check for tender spots. The diagnosis of FMS may be made if you have widespread pain for more than 3 months.

Once I have FMS, will I always have it?

FMS may change over time. How severe FMS is varies from person to person. Some days or periods of time may be better than others.

How is FMS treated?

There is no one treatment for FMS. The goal of treatment is to:

- reduce your pain as much as possible
- improve how well you sleep
- manage your other symptoms
- improve your overall fitness and endurance

Treatment may consist of a combination of:

- an aerobic exercise program such as walking or swimming to improve muscle fitness and reduce pain and tenderness. The goal is to achieve a balance between too much and too little activity.
- learn what makes you feel worse – and manage these situations
- heat and massage
- lifestyle changes which conserve energy and reduce pain
- relaxation techniques
- acupuncture and acupressure
- medication. Medicines which are antidepressants to elevate your mood, help you sleep and relax. These medicines in low doses may help the pain. Also, medications like Ibuprofen may help.
- support groups may help you learn from others with similar problems

Websites

www.fmnetnews.com

www.arthritis.ca

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