

## Fibromyalgia

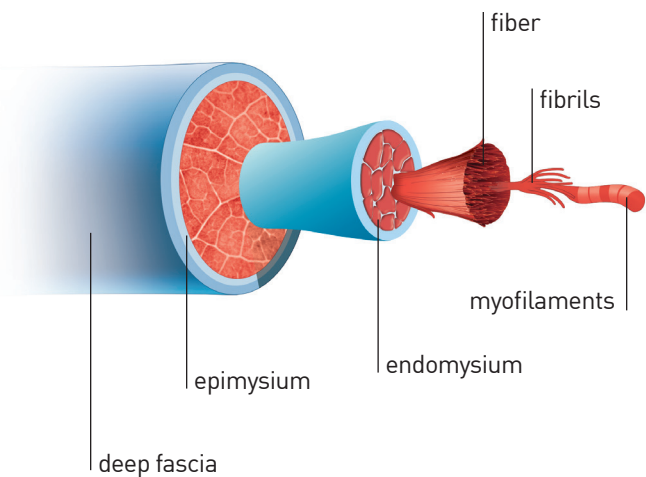
(also called FM, FMG, or FMS)

### Overview

Fibromyalgia is a condition characterized by aching and pain in muscles, tendons and joints all over the body, especially along the spine.

There are measurable changes in body chemistry and function in some people with fibromyalgia. These changes may be responsible for certain symptoms. However, fibromyalgia is not associated with muscle, nerve or joint injury; inadequate muscle repair; or any serious bodily damage or disease.

When stress continues without relief, your body doesn't have time to relax or prepare for the next challenge. This is called *distress*.



### Causes & Symptoms

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown. There are, however, many theories about why people get fibromyalgia. One theory suggests that stress contributes to the onset of fibromyalgia. When fibromyalgia begins, stresses in a person's life are prominent. Stress often results in disturbed sleep patterns and a lack of restful sleep. When you don't get enough sleep, your body does not produce the chemicals necessary to control or regulate pain. A lack of these pain-regulating chemicals results in tenderness in the upper back and forearms, leading to the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Physical and emotional factors may also contribute to the onset of fibromyalgia. For example, a physical illness (such as an infection) could cause changes in your body chemistry that lead to pain and sleeplessness.

**The pain in people with fibromyalgia usually seems worse when they are trying to relax and is less noticeable during busy activities or exercise. Other symptoms are often associated with the pain, including:**

- Sleep disturbance
- Depression
- Daytime tiredness
- Headaches
- Alternating diarrhea and constipation
- Numbness and tingling in the hands or feet
- Feelings of weakness
- Difficulty remembering
- Dizziness
- Increased sensitivity to light, odors and sound

Women tend to have fibromyalgia more often than men. In Europe, some studies suggest that as many as 14% of women may have fibromyalgia symptoms. In the United States, a much lower estimate – 2 to 4% of women and men – have fibromyalgia.

### Diagnosis

A complete evaluation of your medical history and a physical examination will be used to help your Spine Center provider identify a proper diagnosis, and it will also help exclude other illnesses with similar symptoms (such as *rheumatoid arthritis*, muscle inflammation and *bursitis*). Often people who have fibromyalgia experience abnormal sensitivity when pressure is applied to common “tender points” or locations on the body.

### Treatment

Those with fibromyalgia receive individual treatment based on several factors including overall health, medical history, severity of pain and the presence of other symptoms.

#### Treatment for fibromyalgia includes:

- Medications that decrease pain and improve sleep.
- Lifestyle changes including stress reduction.
- Exercises to improve cardiovascular (heart and lung) health.
- Relaxation techniques to relieve muscle tension.

**Medications** – Medications that increase restful sleep, such as low doses of anti-depressant drugs taken prior to sleep, may help. Other forms of sleeping medication are not very helpful for those with fibromyalgia.

No current medications completely relieve pain associated with fibromyalgia. However, acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) is both helpful and much safer than other analgesics (pain-relieving medications).

**Exercise** – Walking, biking, swimming and water aerobics are good activities to choose when starting an exercise program. Your physician or physical therapist can help you choose an exercise program that is right for you.

Participating in aerobic exercise for half an hour, three times each week is an important step toward improving fibromyalgia symptoms. Exercise increases heart and lung function and stretches tight, sore muscles.

**Coping with Stress** – Certain stress factors in life may not be easily eliminated. Evaluating the causes of stress and learning new ways to cope may improve fibromyalgia symptoms. Anxiety and depression are major contributors to stress and must be treated to improve fibromyalgia.

Relaxation techniques can also help relieve muscle tension and reduce stress. Professionals trained in stress management can help teach you these techniques.