



# Fibromyalgia

## Understanding and Living with It



### What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that causes widespread pain, fatigue, and tenderness throughout the body. It does not cause damage to joints, muscles, or organs, but it can significantly affect quality of life.

**It is NOT an autoimmune disease and NOT arthritis.**

Instead, it is thought to involve changes in how the brain and nerves process pain signals, making the body more sensitive to pain.

### Common Symptoms

- Widespread muscle or joint pain
- Fatigue, even after restful sleep
- Brain fog ("fibro fog") – difficulty with memory or concentration
- Sleep disturbances (trouble falling or staying asleep)
- Sensitivity to light, sound, or temperature
- Headaches, irritable bowel symptoms, or tingling in hands/feet (sometimes)



### Why does it happen?

The exact cause is unknown. Research suggests fibromyalgia is related to the way the nervous system amplifies pain signals.

- It is not caused by inflammation or immune system attack (as in autoimmune diseases like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis).
- Stress, infections, or physical/emotional trauma can sometimes trigger or worsen symptoms.





## How is it diagnosed?

There is no single blood test or X-ray. Diagnosis is made based on symptoms, physical exam, and ruling out other conditions.

## Management

There is no single cure, but many strategies can help improve symptoms and quality of life.

### Lifestyle

- **Regular gentle activity:** walking, stretching, swimming, yoga, or tai chi
- **Good sleep habits:** keep a consistent sleep schedule, limit caffeine, create a calming bedtime routine
- **Stress reduction:** mindfulness, breathing exercises, counseling, or support groups
- **Healthy diet:** balanced meals with whole foods and hydration

### Medications

- Certain medications may help with pain, sleep, or fatigue, including antidepressants, nerve-pain medications, or muscle relaxants (as prescribed).

### Other Therapies

- Physical or occupational therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to help with coping strategies
- Complementary options like acupuncture or meditation may help some people

## When to Call Your Doctor

- New or worsening symptoms
- Medication side effects
- Trouble managing daily activities despite lifestyle changes



### Important Reminder:

Fibromyalgia is not autoimmune, not inflammatory, and not degenerative. It will not cause damage to your joints, muscles, or organs. But it can significantly impact quality of life and treatment focuses on reducing symptoms and improving function.

## Self-Care Tips

- **Pace yourself:** avoid the cycle of overdoing things on “good” days followed by severe fatigue or pain
- **Track your symptoms:** noting triggers can help guide your care
- **Build a support system:** family, friends, support groups, and your healthcare team
- **Remember:** Fibromyalgia is real, even if it doesn’t show up on scans or blood tests.

