



Fibromyalgia Fact Sheet



What is fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia [fy-broh-my-AL-juh]

Fibromyalgia is a long-term chronic condition typically characterized by these symptoms:

- Chronic (> 3 months), widespread, musculoskeletal pain (often described as aching, burning, or throbbing) that does not have a known cause (i.e., knee pain from a knee injury or arthritis)
- Fatigue, even after a full night's sleep or sometimes even from carrying out daily activities
- Sleep disturbances (like trouble falling or staying asleep, or feeling unrefreshed)
- Cognitive difficulties, often called "fibro fog" (problems with memory, attention, or mental clarity)

The intensity of these symptoms can range from mild to severe and debilitating.

These four symptoms are the hallmark symptoms of fibromyalgia, but many people with fibromyalgia have other [symptoms or co-occurring conditions](#).

It is important to remember that fibromyalgia feels and presents differently for everyone, meaning you may share symptoms or have different symptoms that other people with fibromyalgia may not have. Each person's fibromyalgia varies in severity depending on the day or the moment.



What we do know

- The pain you experience is real and should be validated
- It is not a mental health condition
- Fibromyalgia feels and presents differently for everyone; Each person's fibromyalgia varies in severity depending on the day or the moment
- It doesn't cause injury or damage
- It can be managed with self management tools and in collaboration with your health team
- Not associated with reduced life expectancy

What causes fibromyalgia

Researchers do not yet agree on the cause of fibromyalgia. Some believe it involves abnormal pain processing in the brain where the central nervous system amplifies pain signals, while others suggest neurological, genetics or post-infectious origins. What researchers do agree on is that the exact cause of fibromyalgia remains unknown. They also agree that fibromyalgia is real, and that it involves altered pain processing.

How is fibromyalgia diagnosed

There is no medical test for fibromyalgia at this time.

Fibromyalgia can be diagnosed using [the revised 2016 diagnostic criteria](#). Fibromyalgia is not a diagnosis of exclusion. Doctors should diagnose your fibromyalgia if you fit the criteria and then rule out other conditions you might have.

How is fibromyalgia treated

Fibromyalgia may be treated with a combination of therapies. Some include medication and others do not. Management of Evidence-Based Fibromyalgia Symptoms and Possible Co-Occurring Conditions is treated based on the specific needs of the individual. This includes medical and non-medical therapies.





Non-medication therapies

Movement / Exercise

This is the recommended treatment for fibromyalgia. The key is to start slowly to build tolerance and increase activity as you are able. Low-impact aerobic activities (like walking or swimming), stretching exercises, yoga, tai chi, qigong are great options.

Remember: Start low, go slow.

Sleep Hygiene

To improve sleep, create regular sleep habits, like going to bed and waking at the same time each day. Restrict screen time in the evening, and avoid naps, if able. Limit caffeine and nicotine use (especially later in the day) as they can worsen sleep for people with fibromyalgia.

Complementary therapies

These may include, but are not limited to, massage, acupuncture, osteopathic treatments. See the [FAC Fibro Flare Kit](#)

Counselling therapy

A therapist can help you learn coping skills on how to manage pain, anxiety and the stress associated with fibromyalgia. Therapy can also help you understand and employ the concept of 'pacing': managing your activity based on your symptoms, providing ample time to recover from activities, and ensuring movement when able.

Positive Peer support groups

Seek support both online and in person from like-minded people who understand what you are going through.





Medication

Your healthcare provider may prescribe one or more medications for your condition. Many fibromyalgia patients are sensitive to drugs and tolerate them better by starting with small doses and increasing gradually, if needed.

There are two medications formally approved by Health Canada specifically for the treatment of fibromyalgia: [Duloxetine](#) (Cymbalta™), and pregabalin (Lyrica®). These two drugs each work differently to change pain pathways to reduce pain.

Other medications may be considered, depending on your individual symptoms.

It takes time to see results from these medications. The length of time depends on the individual medication and varies from patient to patient.

Not every medication works for everyone and the side effects may outweigh the benefits. Medications must be assessed and monitored by your healthcare providers. Your healthcare provider will need to consider your other medical conditions, prescriptions, non-prescription drugs and natural products.

What does Fibromyalgia feel like

Fibromyalgia can feel like having a severe case of the flu over many months or years. Keep in mind that fibromyalgia feels different for everyone.

If you experience symptoms that are not usual for you, consult a healthcare professional.





Is fibromyalgia a disability

In Canada, fibromyalgia is recognized by the federal government as a disability.

People with fibromyalgia may be eligible to apply for the [Disability Tax Credit](#) (DTC), which requires your physician to complete the necessary medical certification. If approved, you may then be eligible to apply for the [Canada Disability Benefit](#) (CDB). You may also qualify for [Canada Pension Plan Disability](#) (CPP-D) benefits, depending on your circumstances. There may be provincial benefits you can apply for, depending on your province.

Questions to ask your Doctor

1. What activities and habits will help or worsen my condition?
2. Are there any free community resources that could help me manage my fibromyalgia?
3. How do I exercise with fibromyalgia?
4. Can you help me improve my sleep hygiene?
5. What medications could I be taking to help my fibromyalgia?
6. What medications am I taking that might be interacting negatively with my fibromyalgia?
7. Can you assist me by completing the required medical forms to support my application for disability benefits?

If you are seeking further information on other topics related to your fibromyalgia go to the Fibromyalgia Association Canada (FAC) website <https://www.fibrocanada.ca/>

