



## Living with Fibromyalgia

The Complete Guide to Prevention and Treatment

By Anton Weeding

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### **About Anton Weeding**

Anton Weeding had a long career as a landscape gardener.

He also has been an enthusiastic author for years but this is his first book.

Members of his family have suffered this debilitating condition and Anton wrote this book to provide others with the information he gathered from their experiences and his research on their behalf.

Anton hopes that his writing will help readers and their families.

He says that maintaining a positive attitude, being patient and following the medical and exercise regimens can be very difficult because of the fatigue and pain.

But, there is more research being done on treatments for fibromyalgia and relief is possible even if a cure may be further away.

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## Part-I: Introduction

### 1. Fibromyalgia – An Overview

Fibromyalgia is a painful condition that leaves you aching all over. You may feel tired, have a disturbed sleeping pattern and irritable bowel syndrome. If this persists for more than three months, you could be diagnosed as a patient with fibromyalgia, also known as fibrositis. Doctors have studied fibromyalgia for more than two hundred years. However, they recognized fibromyalgia as a disorder only in 1987. About six percent of the general population can suffer from fibromyalgia. People between the ages of twenty to fifty are prone to get this condition. Women have four times more chance of developing this painful condition than men.

The causes contributing to fibromyalgia are yet unknown, though some researchers feel fibromyalgia is a genetic condition. Stress can also be a causative factor. A hypothesis suggests that persons suffering from fibromyalgia show a considerable reduction in dopamine synthesis in the pain sensing areas of the brain. Since dopamine plays a role in pain reduction, these people are more sensitive to pain. Another theory suggests that dysfunction of serotonin production and regulation in the brain causes fibromyalgia.

The sleep disturbance theory feels that disturbance during stage four of sleep causes a neurochemical disturbance that results in fibromyalgia. According to this theory, during stage 4 of sleep resetting of the pain sensing mechanism takes place. When there is disruption of sleep, the pain control mechanism goes haywire and results in the whole body becoming sensitive to pain.

Fibromyalgia patients tend to be depressed and irritable, because outwardly they exhibit no signs of deformity or suffering, making it difficult for others to understand the cause of their pain. Patients complain of pain all over the body, above and below the waist. They suffer a stinging sensation on the skin, severe muscle contraction, and fatigue.



They have an increased sensitivity especially at pressure points like the neck, shoulder, limbs, and the backbone with a burning sensation all over the body. Lack of sleep can cause short-term memory loss and a failure to multitask. Some patients may exhibit temporomandibular joint disorder, while a few may have hypoglycemia. The severity and duration of the symptoms can vary in individuals with conditions like increased physical activity, changes in humidity and pressure, and the weather.

You must discuss all symptoms with your doctor, as there are no definitive tests to diagnose fibromyalgia. Patients suffering chronic pain for more than three months on both sides of the body may have fibromyalgia. Doctors suspend weights from the known 18 pressure points and those experiencing pain in more than 11 pressure points may have fibromyalgia.

The present treatment for fibromyalgia includes medicines like muscle relaxants and antidepressants or the use of combination drugs to bring relief. Intake of folic acid and natural supplements like Gingko Biloba brings some respite in some patients. Alternative therapies and physical exercise can help relieve stress and induce sleep, thus helping the patient to relax. A combination of exercise, balanced diet, and massage can help overcome exhaustion and pain. Some doctors believe fibromyalgia is a mental disorder. Their line of treatment includes counseling, biofeedback, and use of techniques like meditation to overcome stress.

Fibromyalgia affects the quality of life of the patient, though it is not a physical disability. There are periods of time when the pain is intolerable, rendering the person unable to perform even simple tasks. The US government gives some social security to sufferers of fibromyalgia. Therefore understanding fibromyalgia can help you cope better in its management.

Part-II: Understanding Fibromyalgia

## 2. What is Fibromyalgia?

Mohamed Yunus and his team first reported the prevalence of a medical condition, fibromyalgia in the 1980s. Previously doctors called this fibrositis, or non-articular rheumatism, as it does not cause inflammation of the joints. Fibromyalgia is a condition that results in aching joints, muscles, and tendons. The term fibromyalgia means literally pain in the connective tissue and muscles. Patients of fibromyalgia suffer from anxiety, disturbed sleep pattern, irregular bowel syndrome, and depression. They are irritable and may have short-term memory loss and an inability to multitask. Due to lack of sleep, they feel tired and irritable most of the time. Patients are more sensitive to pain especially at the pressure points, compared to normal individuals. Since there are no outward signs of this condition, there is a lack of empathy for the sufferers.

### Cause

Doctors still do not know what causes fibromyalgia and research work continues to find out the reasons for this painful condition.

### Incidence

Fibromyalgia can develop in about two to six percent of the population, irrespective of age, gender, and race. However, it affects more women than men, especially over the age of fifty years. Therefore, it greatly affects productivity and efficiency of the workforce.

Fibromyalgia does not confine the person to bed rest, but is a painful condition to live with. The intensity and duration of pain from person to person and does not affect the natural life of the person.

## **Types of Fibromyalgia**

There are four main types of fibromyalgia identified by researchers, though some believe there is only one type of fibromyalgia.

### **Primary Fibromyalgia**

An individual with primary fibromyalgia may have been thought to have arthritis, lupus, or another rheumatoid condition. If they display tenderness in at least eleven of the eighteen pressure points, then fibromyalgia should be considered a possibility.

Primary fibromyalgia mostly affects young women, though men and children of both sexes can also develop this condition.

### **Secondary Fibromyalgia**

This occurs due to another underlying illness and occurs more often in men. In secondary fibromyalgia, the person experiences pain only in the affected area. It is of two types, one that occurs due to an existing disease like lupus, or cancer. The person suffers a limb contraction and the pain persists even after the rheumatism subsides.

The second type known as posttraumatic fibromyalgia happens because of a severe trauma like a car accident or overuse of muscles. The person suffers damage to spinal muscles and a severe spasm. The pain may first appear as a headache but increases gradually and affects the limbs. Overuse of muscles, leads to carpal tunnel syndrome, commonly seen in those using computers. The result of overuse is the same as that of a single trauma with a gradual weakening of the spinal muscles. Other associated painful conditions due to this type of fibromyalgia are shoulder pain and tennis elbow.

### **Concomitant Fibromyalgia**

This occurs in association with connective tissue pain, and arthritis. People suffering from osteoarthritis or scoliosis may also experience concomitant fibromyalgia, but the two conditions may be unrelated.

## Regional Fibromyalgia

A person suffers pain only in a particular region and can exhibit tenderness at eleven of the eighteen pressure points.

Another classification system identifies a few other types of fibromyalgia:

**Mood related fibromyalgia** results in depression and irritation that are the result of disturbed sleep. Disturbance in sleep may result in injury to muscles of the face and neck and results in fibromyalgia.

**Hormone-related fibromyalgia:** Hyperthyroidism may result in disturbed sleep and strain in the muscles, resulting in fibromyalgia. Menopausal and perimenopausal women suffer repeated pain in the neck and back due to changes in hormones, and can end up with fibromyalgia.

**Age-dependent fibromyalgia:** Usually older persons develop fibromyalgia with increasing age due to a degenerating body and a variety of other factors.

## Signs and Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

If you have a family history of fibromyalgia or suspect someone to have this condition, here is what you should look for. Since the symptoms are similar to those of autoimmune disease, or skeletal problems, it requires a doctor to relate all symptoms before diagnosing the condition as fibromyalgia.

These signs can help in a better diagnosis and management of fibromyalgia. The person may have a runny nose, dry cough, breathlessness, and difficulty in climbing stairs. Additionally he may have abdominal pain, toothache, and a stiff neck.

### Symptoms of fibromyalgia

These may differ from person to person and vary in their intensity and severity. Some people show a marked increase in the symptoms with changes in the weather or other environmental factors.

Cold weather, allergies, and changes in hormonal levels can aggravate some of the symptoms of fibromyalgia. A few people may have chronic pain all over the body while others may have localized pain.

**Chronic Fatigue:** The person feels totally devoid of energy. This feeling may cloud his thinking and lead to cognitive problems. The feeling is similar to the one after a severe bout of flu.

**Pain all over the body:** This manifests as a throbbing pain over the arms and legs, back, neck and results in aching muscles. The pain is more in muscles like the wrist that you use repeatedly and continues for a prolonged period. Some people experience a stinging sensation all over the body.

**Irritable bowel syndrome:** People complain of constipation, gastro-esophageal reflux, and stomach aches.

**Headache:** A few people report migraine-like headaches, while some have a temporomandibular jaw malfunction, resulting in aching jaws.

**Facial pain:** Aching muscles in the neck and shoulders can result in facial pain.

**Disturbed sleep pattern:** People with fibromyalgia often wake up in the night and cannot sleep deeply. They suffer from a lack of deep, restful sleep. Others may have restless leg syndrome or severe nocturnal muscle contractions, leading to disturbed sleep. These people have no trouble falling asleep, but due to the aforementioned factors wake up feeling tired.

**Increased sensitivity:** Fibromyalgia patients have an increased sensitivity to light, certain odors and to touch.

**Other symptoms:** These include depression, anxiety, irritation, lack of focus, mood swings, dry eyes and mouth and giddiness. Women may experience painful cramps and premenstrual syndrome.

Some people have difficulty with memory and multi-tasking. There can be an impairment of hearing and vision in a few cases. They experience bloating and have difficulty with balance and coordination.

Others have pain in the chest area, unrelated to the heart, and pain in the heel or the pelvic region. There can be an increase in problems of the ear or nose and great variation in the weight of the person. There is an inability to bear too much heat or cold.

## What is the Real Cause of Fibromyalgia?

Researchers are still trying to find the real cause of fibromyalgia. They have formulated several theories that may be true for a few patients but not all. In general, patients of fibromyalgia are more sensitive to pain compared to normal individuals. This is because the brain of such patients changes with continuous nervous stimulation. The change is neurochemical, because of which the brain neurons react excessively to pain sensation.

Here are some probable causes of fibromyalgia:

**Disturbed sleep:** People who experience sleep disturbance in stage 4 of sleep undergo a neurochemical change that can result in fibromyalgia. According to this theory during the stage 4 of sleep, resetting of the pain sensing mechanism takes place. When there is disruption of sleep, the pain control mechanism goes haywire and results in the whole body becoming sensitive to pain.

**Trauma:** A serious accident hurting the spinal cord or the central nervous system can result in fibromyalgia.

**Severe infection:** A viral or bacterial infection like the Epstein -Barr virus or Candida fungal infection can result in fibromyalgia.

**Change in dopamine levels:** A hypothesis suggests that persons suffering from fibromyalgia show a considerable reduction in dopamine synthesis in the pain sensing areas of the brain. Since dopamine plays a role in pain reduction, these people are more sensitive to pain.

**Malfunction in serotonin secretion:** A low-level of serotonin in the brain causes fibromyalgia.

**Irregular functioning of the sympathetic nervous system:** This part of the nervous system controls involuntary body functions like the heart rate, and blood vessel contraction. Any defect in this system leads to lethargy, and rigidity affiliated with fibromyalgia.

**Defect in the endocrine system:** Abnormalities in hormonal secretion and levels in the body can lead to fibromyalgia.

**Stress:** Persons experiencing stress at home or in the workplace can end up with fibromyalgia, due to an inability cope with high-pressure.

**Defective genes:** Some people with defective genes may have an increased sensitivity to pain, which may lead to development of fibromyalgia.

**Lack of exercise:** This causes lactic acid buildup in the leg muscles and results in chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia.



## What are the Risk Factors of Fibromyalgia?

Research involving fibromyalgia is ongoing and scientists are still probing the causative factors of this painful and chronic condition. They have short-listed certain factors that increase a person’s risk towards developing fibromyalgia. Here is a discussion of the probable risk factors. If you fall under any of these categories, consult your health care provider for prevention and discuss your medical history with him.

**Hereditary factors:** Some studies suggest the role of genetics in the occurrence of fibromyalgia. Women with a close family member diagnosed with fibromyalgia are more prone to getting it. About ten percent of such children may develop fibromyalgia or suffer chronic pain. However, children of such people do not necessarily suffer psychological problems as commonly believed.

**Drastic lifestyle changes:** Individuals who undergo traumatic or life-altering events like a serious accident or a traumatic divorce have a greater chance of getting fibromyalgia.

**Sex:** Women are more likely to get fibromyalgia compared to men and they experience a greater severity of the symptoms.

**Age:** Fibromyalgia usually develops between the ages of twenty to sixty in men and women. Children rarely develop fibromyalgia. The chance of getting fibromyalgia increases with age and people above sixty years are more likely to get it. Women approaching menopause have a greater chance of getting fibromyalgia.

In rare cases, some children get juvenile primary fibromyalgia around adolescence. However, they respond better to treatment with a better chance of recovery.

**Rheumatic conditions:** Persons with a history of lupus, rheumatic conditions, arthritis, or ankylosing spondylitis are at a greater risk for getting fibromyalgia.

**Mental disorders:** Most patients of fibromyalgia exhibit psychological disturbances, but in no way does a mental illness cause fibromyalgia.

**Disruption in sleep:** Several studies indicate that individuals suffering from sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome or insomnia can develop fibromyalgia.

## Who Gets Fibromyalgia?

**F**ibromyalgia is a condition that results in painful muscles and joints. About two to six percent of the general population can develop this condition, irrespective of gender and race. Researchers are still trying to identify people at risk for developing fibromyalgia, though there are no known causes for this condition.

Factors common to people who may get fibromyalgia include:

**Sex:** Women are more at risk for developing this painful disease. Men can also get fibromyalgia, but women have more than a four-time chance of getting fibromyalgia compared to men. Children hardly ever get this disease.

**Age:** Men and women between the ages of twenty and fifty-five are more prone to getting fibromyalgia. Women in the reproductive range are more likely to get fibromyalgia.

**Heredity:** If a close family member has signs of fibromyalgia, women in that family have a greater chance of getting fibromyalgia. Though no studies prove the role of genetics, some hereditary factors may cause this condition.

**Rheumatic conditions:** People with a history of arthritis or rheumatic joints are more at risk for developing fibromyalgia.

**Ankylosing spondylitis:** This is a painful condition affecting the area of the body between the pelvis and the spine. Persons with ankylosing spondylitis have a much greater chance of getting fibromyalgia.

**Lupus:** Those with a history are also more likely than the average person to get fibromyalgia.

**Disturbed Sleep:** Those who suffer severe sleep disorders are at greater risk for getting fibromyalgia.

## Fibromyalgia in Children

Fibromyalgia, a severe disorder characterized by pain, stiffness, and fatigue is not a problem only for adults. Some children are also susceptible to the malaise. One of the most disturbing features of fibromyalgia is that it cannot be detected through laboratory diagnosis such as X-ray, scan or blood tests.

The disorder results in tenderness of pressure points located in the buttocks, hips, thighs, chest and neck. While it may affect 11 out of 18 pressure points in adults, the number might be closer to five such points in children.

In America alone, over 5 million people are affected by fibromyalgia. Around one sixth of them are under 18 years of age. Females are more likely to develop fibromyalgia in comparison to their male counterparts.

The actual factor that triggers the disorder is yet unknown though it is said that it may have a genetic component. Pre-existing conditions, such as irritable bowel, Raynaud’s phenomenon, restless leg syndrome and PMS are known to facilitate fibromyalgia.

In children, the disorder is usually treatable with proper medication, self-education, therapy and exercises.

The family should be supportive enough to manage the child’s special needs and maintain a lifestyle to suit him or her.

The severity of the disorder must be kept in mind when determining the activities within the household. Sometimes, your child might be taken as lazy, but you should guard him or her against any such criticism.

Make the home a secure and comfortable place for your child.

In certain cases, when the disorder brings with it extreme tension and stress, you might have to look for a therapist to safeguard your child from falling into depression.

Family counseling is yet another means to keep your child mentally healthy.

If this does not help, you might opt for medication.

Antidepressants of the SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor) variety like Elavil help in providing sound sleep and may decrease pain considerably.

Cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril), a muscle relaxant, also stimulates sleep and may bring relief to the child from pain and restlessness.

But, your personal attention and love is most important in bringing him or her back to normalcy.

## Recent Research on Fibromyalgia

With fibromyalgia quite widespread among the Caucasians affecting around 5 million people in America alone many researches are being conducted to find the exact cause of the disorder.

Researchers feel that fibromyalgia may result from the body's hypersensitivity to stimuli that would not trigger pain in people that are normal.

Earlier studies done on the subject showed that individuals suffering from fibromyalgia have decreased blood flow to parts of the brain that deal with pain.

Yet another factor that might affect the disorder is the role of female reproductive hormones. Researchers are trying to determine the precise role of sex hormones in regard to stress, pain sensitivity, etc. NIAMS has organized research at various levels and is developing a rodent model of the fibromyalgia pain. The findings of the study will further help toward discovering its actual cause.

Findings have revealed that the body's emotional or physical stress in response to a problem may further aggravate it.

It is the same with fibromyalgia. The interaction between the endocrine or hormonal system and the nervous system is being closely studied to try to uncover the root cause.

Scientists observed that people whose bodies produce inadequate cortisol hormone experience similar symptoms to those suffering from fibromyalgia. Detailed analysis of a possible relation between the adrenal glands (that produce cortisol) and fibromyalgia is being studied.

Exercise has been found to generate a positive effect on the body and enhance the activity of its adrenal and pituitary glands. These glands produce hormones required for regulating emotions, sleep, and to help to deal with pain.

People that have fibromyalgia and insomnia exhibit similar tendencies. Tests are being done to treat the former with strategies developed to control insomnia so that sleep disorder in such patients might be reduced or prevented.

With research at current levels, fibromyalgia can at least be treated and patients could find some relief from the excruciating pain.

## Myths and Facts about Fibromyalgia

There are several misconceptions or myths related to fibromyalgia.

The worst mistake you might commit is to not take the disorder seriously. It is a chronic problem that mars your sleep, yields tremendous musculoskeletal pain and creates multiple tender points in your body. Fibromyalgia is currently seen as a syndrome that is a collection of symptoms rather than a disease.

It is not a new kind of disorder that has just raised its head. Earlier, people gave it different names, varying from fibrositis, tension myalgia to psychogenic rheumatism and muscular rheumatism.

While many people think it is, fibromyalgia is not a gender-specific disorder though women are ten times more susceptible to the disorder than men.

It takes about 5 years to develop and is usually difficult to diagnose the disorder in that period. Physical symptoms often vary in different individuals, but inadequate sleep is a common sign that occurs in almost 90% of the cases.

It will be a step too far to regard it as a fatal disease. Though it generates many physical problems, fibromyalgia does not damage the body.

It results in muscular pain and fatigue, which reduces the working efficiency of your body. Therefore, simple day-to-day tasks like washing clothes and other household work may seem monumental tasks.



### **Part-III: Impact of Fibromyalgia**

## **Fibromyalgia and Your Emotions**

Sickness for a healthy person not only brings physical pain but also mental agony and this is even more serious when fibromyalgia is present. This disorder debilitates you so that you are unable to enjoy the sports, exercise and other activities that have been a part of your life all these years.

You will often not be able to meet the needs of your family and friends, as your body is fatigued when others wish you to join them in enjoying active sports and other activities.

This may bring a sense of inadequacy and worthlessness. While your irritation is justified, it may cost you some very valuable relationships. Your spouse may not take it easily and friends might distance themselves.

So, it becomes very important to control the effects of fibromyalgia that cripples you both physically and mentally.

According to research, about 30% of patients suffering from fibromyalgia may face psychological distress. One reason might be the effect of fibromyalgia on neurotransmitters and other regulatory systems in our bodies. Hormonal imbalance can result in low blood sugar or reduced hormone generation in the thyroid causing depression.

Panic and anxiety may be triggered due to adrenal disturbances while irregularities in the patient's immune mechanism might bring fatigue and lethargy.

Do you know that disturbed night sleep for a few days can produce all these problems? Studies reveal that people experiencing disturbed sleep for a few nights may cause these problems to develop even though the people do not necessarily suffer from fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia patients often hear people saying that it is just a mental illness. Often, they are even reluctant to visit a counselor. Counseling and understanding

from family and friends can help these patients reduce the disorder’s emotional impact.

## **Stress and Fibromyalgia**

**S**tress is one of the causes that makes fibromyalgia worse. Stress can be the result of fatigue and muscle pain that are associated with fibromyalgia. There are many theories that suggest that the stressful condition of womens' modern lifestyles is the cause of fibromyalgia.

### **How Can I Control Fibromyalgia Stress Symptoms?**

Nearly 75% of people with fibromyalgia lead a very stressful life. It is estimated that 22.7 million Americans may suffer from fibromyalgia.

However, the exact cause of stress is not known. It can lower your energy and vitality level and snatch simple pleasures out of life.

Too much stress can help various diseases to appear; one of them is fibromyalgia. Too much stress in fibromyalgia can worsen the conditions.

There is no specific treatment for fibromyalgia, but there are alternative methods that some believe can help to combat the negative effects of fibromyalgia.

### **Stress Management**

Pacing is one of the important concepts of managing fibromyalgia. Pacing helps reduce stress in an individual. Pacing your activities involves:

- ✓ taking things as they come
- ✓ being flexible, keeping your goals at a modest level, and
- ✓ working within your capacity.

You could involve yourself in activities such as doing housework, various forms of mental activity, planning your diet, gardening etc.

Stop whenever you feel it is time to slow down to rest.

### **Is Fibromyalgia Stress a “Positive”?**

You can consider stress as a positive to help you move forward. Positive stress will help you to great extent to make your life merrier again.

Stress may, at times, help you to speak your mind to someone, lighten your mood, and restore peace.

Some ways to keep stress down:

1. Find out your area of interest
2. Do not think of negative things
3. Try to change your negative thoughts to positive ones.
4. Take a warm, relaxing bath
5. Listen to some good relaxing music for at least 15 to 20 minutes
6. Do not overdo anything
7. Develop diaphragm breathing, as it will help you reduce pain and stress
8. Work out coping techniques for situations that make your symptoms flare up.

## 13. Fibromyalgia and Fatigue

People suffering from fibromyalgia often undergo extreme fatigue.

This adds to the unbearable pain and difficulty in coping with the disease. The fatigue can take a further toll by reducing the individual’s ability to carry out daily chores.

### The Effects of Fatigue

About 90% of the people suffering from fibromyalgia syndrome report moderate to severe fatigue. It can last for months.

However, it is not necessary that all people suffering from this syndrome will have fatigue; many adjust themselves to a life with the reduced energy level.

The excessive pain experienced by people suffering from this disease makes sleeping very difficult and even impossible at times. This causes fatigue to increase and magnifies the effect of the severe pain.

### The Causes of Fatigue

- 1. Pain:** Many people feel that fatigue associated with fibromyalgia is a result of pain that causes a lack of sleep and sleepless nights.
- 2. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or CFS:** CFS may also be the reason why people with fibromyalgia suffer from fatigue. Patients are diagnosed with CFS if they have suffered from fatigue for a minimum of six months.
- 3. Sleeping Disorder:** Researchers also feel that fibromyalgia patients may have sleep disorders or disturbances during sleep or may develop lasting sleeping disorders.
- 4. EEG Anomaly:** The sufferer may also find deep sleep very difficult. This is known as an EEG anomaly. These activities, when viewed on monitors, are seen as alpha waves that cause people to wake suddenly and feel very restless leading to fatigue.

**5. Restless Leg syndrome or RLS:** RLS is a pain and a twitch in the legs which is considered another symptom of fibromyalgia. This mostly occurs between 10 pm to 4 am. It may occur in the day too, but mostly occurs in the odd hours of the night. The only way of keeping the pain away is continually moving the legs, which adds to sleep disturbance, resulting in fatigue.

**6. Mitochondrial Dysfunction:** Researchers have recently offered an explanation that states the extreme fatigue in fibromyalgia is to do with the body’s internal source of energy. Mitochondria in our body cells are the powerhouse of our body. The researchers suggest that people suffering from fibromyalgia might have dysfunctional mitochondria, and thereby they cannot generate enough energy for their body to function at a normal level.

## **Fibromyalgia and Women**

Fibromyalgia is more common in women than men. Studies have found that 14% of women in Europe have fibromyalgia whereas in United States it is just 2 to 4%.

### **Why do More Women have the Fibromyalgia Syndrome?**

The percentage of fibromyalgia syndrome is higher in women than in men. Studies also show that African-American women have a higher risk of developing this syndrome than Caucasian women. However, there is no clear answer to why women are mostly affected by this syndrome than men.

### **The Effects on a Woman’s Health**

Fibromyalgia affects women in number of ways:

#### ***The Effect on Reproductive Health:***

Studies seem to show a link between a woman’s reproductive health and fibromyalgia. Women who have fibromyalgia have higher chances of developing breast cysts and dysmenorrhea. It may also affect her sexuality and libido.

#### ***The Effect on Pregnancy:***

Women with fibromyalgia may undergo severe problems during pregnancy. They experience stiffness, fatigue, and pain more than women without the syndrome. However, these symptoms may be wrongly diagnosed as common pregnancy symptoms.

#### ***Fibromyalgia and Premenstrual Syndrome***

Studies also seem to reveal a link between women and serious PMS symptoms. Women with fibromyalgia suffer from insomnia, severe headaches, abdominal cramping and back pain. During their menstrual cycle, women with fibromyalgia tend to suffer from more mental confusion and emotional distress than their counterparts.

### ***The Effect on Menopause***

Many women may be diagnosed with fibromyalgia at the age of 40 to 55, which coincides with the age of menopause. Researchers feel that this could be due to the low-level of estrogen during menopause. Moreover, women with FMS may have more severe post menopausal problems than women who have not undergone menopause.

### **Facts about Fibromyalgia and Women**

1. Many women are diagnosed with this syndrome between the ages of forty and fifty-five.
2. Hormonal changes, such as reduced estrogen level, may encourage conditions like anxiety, sleeplessness and depression.
3. There is no way that you can prevent fibromyalgia. At present, most treatment focuses on conquering the symptoms of fibromyalgia.
4. Your diet may play a major role in preventing fibromyalgia. Eating more organic foods - for example vegetables and fruits or by consuming a high fiber, low fat diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids may have a great benefit.
5. Many physicians advise avoiding foods that contain artificial sweeteners like the Aspartame. Following the advised diet may relieve one from the symptoms of fibromyalgia.
6. Maintaining a lifestyle inclusive of exercise, healthy diet, and staying active is the best form of treatment for fibromyalgia.



## Fibromyalgia and Pregnancy

Fibromyalgia is a disorder affecting more females than males.

It is very important to study the effects of the disorder on pregnancy and vice-versa. There are conflicting views on this. Some researchers feel that it worsens pregnancy-related difficulties but others suggest that the symptoms of fibromyalgia may subside during pregnancy.

Most women suffering from fibromyalgia would have wondered whether it is safe to get pregnant or not. Some might not be sure if their child might also be affected by it or carry the disorder. Rest assured, you have a good chance to give birth to a perfectly healthy child.

Some doctors say that pregnancy reduces and sometimes even eliminates fibromyalgia. They feel that it may be due to the effect of relaxin, an ovarian hormone. During pregnancy, the percentage of relaxin increases ten-fold in a woman's body. Sometimes, relaxin supplements are used to reduce symptoms of fibromyalgia.

If you have fibromyalgia, all you have to do is to plan your pregnancy early and build your body strength in the meantime. You should try to avoid stress and plan to conceive when the symptoms of fibromyalgia are less intense.

The medication routine you follow for fibromyalgia may not be suitable for pregnant mothers, so consult your doctor. Make sure you have a healthy diet and exercise, but do not overdo it.

Light and soothing exercises are good for fibromyalgia patients, especially pregnant women. You can try any form of exercise, from stretching exercises to yoga and aquatic exercises. Heat therapy, in the form of a warm bath, is relaxing.

Proper massage eases muscle pain.

Many patients have complained about the sudden rise in fibromyalgia symptoms just after childbirth. This makes breast-feeding quite difficult for the mother.

Therefore, you have to make it as stress free as possible.

It is better to use a pillow or another support for your head while feeding the baby.

Hold your baby in such a way that you do not have to support his or her body weight completely by yourself. Use a support system. It is advisable to lie down and feed your baby, as it is the least stressful position.

Choose a place that is peaceful as it will ease your muscles and help in largely reducing any pain. Motherhood is precious for every woman and a little caution and care can make it more enjoyable to a fibromyalgia patient.

## Part-IV: Diagnosis and Clinical Aspects

### **Diagnosis of Fibromyalgia**

People affected by fibromyalgia may have to visit several doctors before getting a correct diagnosis. Not every doctor can detect fibromyalgia in the first visit.

This is because the symptoms of fibromyalgia, like chronic pain and fatigue, overlap with those of several other conditions like hypothyroidism and myofascial pain syndrome.

There are no standard laboratory tests for fibromyalgia and the person may not have pain at the time of visiting the doctor. In such a case, the doctor will only attribute the symptoms to fibromyalgia where they can clearly rule out other medical disorders.

#### **Diagnosis by Elimination**

The doctor will physically examine the patient and order blood tests to corroborate his suspicion of fibromyalgia. Blood tests will reject the presence of conditions like lupus, arthritis, infection, cancer, joint or bone dysfunction, polymyalgia rheumatica and anemia.

Symptoms can be similar to that of hormonal problems related to thyroid iodine deficiency, so it important to undergo blood tests for this condition too. Specific blood tests include tests for blood count, liver function tests, and erythrocyte sedimentation rates.

The doctor may perform an electromyogram to check for muscle disorders or conduct an electroencephalogram for nervous disorders.

#### **Choosing a Doctor**

If you are simply changing doctors without any firm diagnosis, seek the help of friends or family members that suffer from fibromyalgia.

Ask your general practitioner for help in choosing a doctor who specializes in fibromyalgia and rheumatic diseases. They can help you seek out an experienced doctor so that you get relief.

Joining a support group lets you discuss problems and get solutions while listening to others and helps you to manage the disease better.

You can read up on various medical websites regarding fibromyalgia and seek the help of experts through the Internet.

## **Diagnosing Fibromyalgia**

### ***Physical Examination***

The doctor will first check the patient physically, based on the patient's description of symptoms. The standard examination requires the presence of pain all over the body; that is above and below the waist, and on both the right and left sides of the body.

Patients experience pain in the neck, chest, and the middle back region. Moreover, this pain must exist for at least three months to be termed fibromyalgia.

### ***Medical and Family History***

The doctor will ask about the medical and family history of the patient to check for a genetic tendency towards fibromyalgia. There is no scientific proof that fibromyalgia is hereditary, but people that have a close relative with fibromyalgia have a greater chance of developing this condition themselves. The patient should reveal all details of medicines that he is presently taking and the presence of discomfort due to infection, muscle or joint pain and changes in weight.

He must also report the use of any herbal supplements, alcohol or drug abuse or if he suffered a serious trauma.

### ***Tender Point Identification***

There are about 80 pressure points in our body whose location is fixed and predictable. An expert physician can detect these pressure points expertly with the thumb, first and second finger

There are eighteen tender points identified all over the body; near the neck, shoulder, hips, knees, and lower back.

The second criteria imply that the patient must experience pain in at least eleven of these eighteen tender points. The doctor presses strongly at these

pressure points and may suspend a weight of four kilograms from all these eighteen points to test tenderness.

The patient may be unaware of these tender points, but will experience pain, if he has fibromyalgia, when the doctor presses the pressure points.

The doctor can also rule out swelling, redness, or a hot sensation in the affected area.

He may repeat testing for pain at other pressure points where there was no pain, if the patient reports presence of other symptoms related to fibromyalgia.

The patient may experience pain at some points at different times. So, the doctor must co-relate pain with other fibromyalgia symptoms listed below.

### **Checking for Fibromyalgia Symptoms**

Some patients may have pain in less than the designated eleven tender points, but they may have other symptoms.

These might include irritable bowel syndrome resulting in constipation or gastroesophageal reflux, and disturbed sleep that leaves you tired when you wake up.

Patients also might have a problem in remembering, difficulty in multi-tasking, and a tendency to lose their balance.

Some patients report acute jaw pain, migraine-type headaches, muscle pain and rigid joints in the morning when they wake up. A few individuals report facial pain due to aching muscles in the face and the neck.

Women may suffer cramps during their periods.

Other fibromyalgia symptoms could include increased sensitivity to pain, a burning sensation, or a stinging sensation in the affected area, giddiness, and sensitivity to stimuli like bright lights and chemicals.

Most patients report a drained-out feeling as if there is a weight tied to their limbs, a feeling similar to one that some people experience when they have influenza.

There are no certain methods of detecting fibromyalgia. There are no invasive tests to confirm its presence.

The Tender Points Method has its disadvantages as the severity and incidence of pain at the designated pressure points varies daily.



## **Fibromyalgia and Chronic Myofascial Pain Syndrome**

Some fibromyalgia patients may also suffer from myofascial pain syndrome.

Myofascial syndrome results in chronic pain in the muscles and fascia all over the body.

Fibromyalgia also results in aching muscles, along with a feeling of increased sensitivity to pressure over the whole body.

It is necessary to understand the difference between the two for proper diagnosis and treatment, since it is common to diagnose one for the other.

Persons affected by fibromyalgia feel tenderness all over the body, while those suffering from myofascial pain experience localized pain.

Fibromyalgia results in widespread pain all over the body while myofascial pain can lead to pain in certain areas like the jaw and face.

### **Incidence**

About fourteen percent of the population may have some form of myofascial pain, while around three to six percent of people develop fibromyalgia.

Women are more prone to getting fibromyalgia, while both men and women have an equal chance of getting myofascial pain syndrome.

### **Symptoms**

In the myofascial condition, there is a formation of trigger points, areas of increased sensitivity in the muscles. This leads to a persistent dull ache and excruciating pain in the affected area. Other symptoms include blurred vision, earache, weakening of muscles and restriction in moving joints, forgetfulness, giddiness, and queasiness. These symptoms vary with increasing stress and changes in the weather.

Patients of fibromyalgia report disturbed sleep patterns, a burning sensation all over the body, chronic fatigue, headaches and irritable bowel syndrome.

## **Causes**

Fibromyalgia can develop due to factors like heredity, a severe trauma, changes in dopamine, due to disturbed sleep, and low serotonin levels. Other probable causes are stress, lack of physical activity and irregular functioning of the sympathetic nervous system.

Myofascial pain syndrome can occur due to depression or chronic pain associated with fibromyalgia. However, the main cause of myofascial pain is musculoskeletal problems in the body.

Excessive physical activity or stress can cause degeneration of muscles leading to development of a trigger point.

## **Diagnosis**

Trigger points of pain help to diagnose myofascial pain while fibromyalgia diagnosis results from a testing of the tender points across the body.

Trigger points build up all over the body at places where the fascia and muscles meet. Fascia is the connective tissue surrounding the organs, blood vessels, and bones all over the body. Wear and tear of the fascia results in myofascial pain syndrome.

## **Treatment**

There is no proper treatment for fibromyalgia and patients have to learn to live with it. However, exercise and pain killing injections can bring relief from myofascial pain.

Patients should try to learn to differentiate between the two types of pain so that they can manage the disease better and improve their quality of life.



## Conditions with Similar Symptoms

It is possible for doctors to mistake other conditions for fibromyalgia, due to a similarity in the symptoms. Moreover, there is no diagnostic test for fibromyalgia, other than testing of tenderness at the eighteen pressure points.

Therefore, doctors may need to rule out other conditions before confirming fibromyalgia. However, fibromyalgia can be concomitant with other conditions.

### Symptoms That Rule Out Fibromyalgia

**Hypothyroidism** can result in fatigue, muscle pain, and depression similar to that associated with fibromyalgia. However, testing the thyroid hormone levels can rule out fibromyalgia.

**Rheumatoid arthritis** causes morning stiffness in joints, tiredness, and tenderness. However, unlike fibromyalgia, pressing the tender points does not cause pain. Some children may have juvenile rheumatoid arthritis with fibromyalgia that needs proper medical attention.

A person with fibromyalgia-like symptoms may have **multiple sclerosis** that can be confirmed by an MRI scan of the brain to detect damage to the brain tissues.

Autoimmune diseases like **Systemic Lupus Erythematosus** result in similar symptoms. Specialized antibody tests can confirm this and rule out fibromyalgia. In an autoimmune disease, the body attacks its own tissues and the symptoms develop gradually. Therefore, the individual should keep a record of his condition to help the doctor in diagnosing it.

It is possible to detect **Lyme disease** in any stage by testing for the presence of spirochete. Sometimes, a delayed response can result in a diagnosis of fibromyalgia. Hence, it is necessary to repeat the tests for fibromyalgia after consulting the doctor.

Some other diseases like crystal induced arthritis, Henoch-Schonlein purpura and Kawasaki’s disease result in signs resembling fibromyalgia.

**Polymyalgia Rheumatica** affects more women and the pain occurs in the hip and shoulder region. This condition may improve gradually or result in a worse condition that causes blindness.

Some **other conditions** that confirm absence of fibromyalgia are cancer, anemia, hepatitis-C and some severe infections.

People who consume **drugs** like anti-histamines and excessive **alcohol** experience chronic fatigue. Fatigue is also a result of drug abuse and giving up excessive coffee consumption.

Changes in the dosage or addition of new drugs in a patient can also result in a feeling of tiredness.

Exposure to certain **chemicals** and **toxins** can result in chronic fatigue and other symptoms resembling fibromyalgia.

### **Symptoms that may Indicate Fibromyalgia**

People that are suffering from temporomandibular joint dysfunction, chronic fatigue syndrome, headaches, and irritable bowel syndrome may have fibromyalgia.

Elderly patients may have osteoarthritis in the joints as well as fibromyalgia.

Individuals with excessive anxiety and depression may also have fibromyalgia.

People with these symptoms may have to undergo several tests to rule out probable diseases and fibromyalgia to get the proper treatment for maximum relief.

## Genetic Factors in Fibromyalgia

There is an ongoing debate about the genetic factors that may lead to fibromyalgia. Some researchers feel that heredity contributes to the occurrence of fibromyalgia in families. Another school of thought feels that psychological factors cause fibromyalgia in closely related individuals.

According to a study, about thirty percent of children of mothers having fibromyalgia end up with the condition and may have psychological problems.

According to another report, more than sixty percent of children have persistent pain and of these ten percent have fibromyalgia. Strangely, children from close families may end up with severe fibromyalgia.

The National Institute of Health has recently commissioned a study to research the occurrence of fibromyalgia because of environmental factors.

Investigations are ongoing as part of a four-year genetic mapping study of more than one hundred and fifty families with fibromyalgia. The project hopes to cover social and environmental issues like a history of abuse or a disturbed childhood in these families.

Another project focuses on symptoms of fibromyalgia like depression, irritable bowel syndrome, and headaches in close relations of people with fibromyalgia.

These ongoing studies hope to probe the link between genetic factors and fibromyalgia. The results of these studies will provide important leads about the cause and possible cures for fibromyalgia.

## Fibromyalgia and Perpetuating Factors

‘Perpetuating factors’ are intricately linked with any syndrome.

One of the world’s most renowned doctors, Janet Travell, who was the White House physician during President John F. Kennedy’s tenure, has dealt with the topic in detail. She observed that ‘perpetuating factors’ are the hidden causes of a medical problem that obstruct the recovery of a person.

While she and David Simons have more specifically dealt with myofascial pain, the same concept of ‘perpetuating factors’ also applies to fibromyalgia.

One of the most common perpetuating factors in case of fibromyalgia is insomnia. It may even be the cause of the disorder.

A few factors can perpetuate insomnia. The chief among them is OSA or obstructive sleep apnea.

In OSA, the sleeping person gasps for breath as the back of the throat closes automatically when the person falls asleep. Once OSA is treated, people suffering from fibromyalgia may exhibit considerable improvement.

Another perpetuating factor can be triggered from metabolic dysfunction. People having fibromyalgia are sometimes found to be suffering from deficiency of a brain chemical, serotonin. In a healthy person, the body uses food nutrients to produce serotonin but metabolic dysfunction makes the deficient.

A number of factors can cause metabolic problems. A person may have an inefficient digestive system that cannot extract the nutrient from the food, or the intestine has difficulty in absorbing the nutrient.

These may constitute the perpetuating factor in facilitating fibromyalgia symptoms.

Both hypoactive and hyperactive thyroid gland can produce many symptoms such as insomnia, muscle stiffness, depression, and fatigue that are also associated with fibromyalgia. Therefore, malfunctioning of the thyroid gland can also become a perpetuating factor for fibromyalgia.

Sometimes even wrong body posture, or a faulty body mechanism, can also act as perpetuating factor. Thus, it becomes quite essential to guard the body against such factors that can either trigger Fibromyalgia pain or aggravate the existing effects.

## Prognosis of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition and patients have to learn to live with it.

Coming to terms with the disease results in better management and a better quality of life for patients.

Medicines and physical exercise can help control the pain while lifestyle changes can reduce or eliminate stress.

Patients of fibromyalgia may sink into depression, stop working and have lower self-confidence than patients of other chronic conditions. The long-term forecast for adults suffering from fibromyalgia is that the condition may improve in a quarter of the patients while remaining the same in most others.

Those who develop fibromyalgia because of trauma do not show significant improvement in the level of pain compared to those who have widespread pain.

A positive attitude to life definitely helps manage the disease better. Children with fibromyalgia have very good chances of recovery with early detection and proper treatment.

The support of family, friends and co-workers is essential to cope with fibromyalgia. The patient should initially take a short period of leave from work, with the intention of joining work at a fixed date.

He should use this time to make necessary changes in life, adjust to the medication and slow down his pace of work. He may opt for less strenuous work, if this is possible.

## **Part-V: Treatment of Fibromyalgia**

### **When to Seek Medical Care**

If there is a family history of fibromyalgia and you experience widespread pain for more than three months continuously, consult a doctor.

Fibromyalgia pain is throbbing, with a stinging sensation in the affected part. You may always feel tired and drained out and you may suffer irritable bowel syndrome; constipation or stomach aches, recurrent headaches, dryness of mouth, severe muscle contractions, and morning rigidity.

However, the pain is usually not extreme, requiring a visit to the Emergency Room. If you have insufferable pain, you may require painkilling injections at the trigger point of the pain. Your local doctor or hospital can help you in pain relief. The doctor may recommend a better medicine that can alleviate the pain.

Never, put off visiting the doctor when you suffer severe pain.

## **Treatment Options for Fibromyalgia**

**F**ibromyalgia is a difficult disease to live with, due to its chronic nature. You need to consult a good rheumatologist or a general practitioner familiar with treating fibromyalgia for best results. You must find out from the doctor about pain management clinics in your vicinity. These clinics have specialists and a holistic approach to treatment and management of fibromyalgia and its associated chronic pain.

Moreover, you need to take the help of friends and family in the treatment since there can be low phases when you need their help and support. A practical and systematic approach can help you live with and manage the fibromyalgia better.

### **Expectation from the treatment**

Fibromyalgia is not a curable condition. The symptoms can get better or not with treatment, depending on your response.

You must have a realistic expectation of pain management from the treatment. You should have a positive outlook towards treatment and it will almost certainly work for you.

Do not get disheartened if one treatment does not work.

There is ongoing research for pain management and scientists are discovering new drugs that will soon be available for patients.

Adopt a whole-of-life approach to disease management, including lifestyle changes to reduce stress and exercise to improve the quality of life.

Join a support group where you can discuss problems and get more information on fibromyalgia, its management and new treatments.

### **Holistic treatment of fibromyalgia**

It helps to use a combination of medication and alternative therapies for best results.



Medicines may have damaging side effects when taken long-term. Always tell your medical practitioner before trying herbal supplements. This lessens the chance there will be no adverse interaction between the two forms of treatment.

There is a four-pronged approach to fibromyalgia treatment:

medication for pain relief and sleep, an exercise regimen to improve circulation and heart pumping, relaxing muscles by use of alternative therapies like acupuncture and massage, and changing your lifestyle to eliminate stress.

## **Types of Medications**

There are several types of medicines available. Here is a discussion of their benefits.

### **Pain relievers**

Pain relievers help overcome pain and rigidity due to your fibromyalgia. This includes over-the-counter drugs like acetaminophen as well as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. These drugs work by suppressing the effect of prostaglandins that cause pain and inflammation. They help relieve headaches, muscle pain and menstrual cramps.

### ***Antidepressants***

Most fibromyalgia patients complain of disturbed sleep, so doctors conduct sleep studies individually to determine the best medicine that can bring better sleep. They may prescribe sleeping pills, but only for a short time because long-term use of sleeping pills interferes with sleeping pattern and can result in insomnia.

Depression is a common effect of fibromyalgia, so the doctor may suggest the use of antidepressants to induce sleep. These drugs increase the level of feel-good chemicals like serotonin and nor epinephrine in the brain, that helps overcome the negative feelings. Latest research has revealed a better class of these drugs like duloxetine for this.

Here is a description of different types of antidepressants:

**Tricyclic** drugs help to induce sleep, increase the level of endorphins in the body and relax the muscles. Doctors prescribe them in low doses at bedtime.

**Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors** decrease your feeling of fatigue by increasing the level of serotonin. When taken alone, they worsen the sleeping pattern of the patient, so doctors prescribe them in low doses along with Tricyclic drugs for best results.

**Mixed reuptake inhibitors** increase the levels of both serotonin and nor epinephrine and often bring relief to the patient.

### ***Muscle Relaxants***

Doctors give them as a short course to overcome muscle contraction and the associated pain. They help overcome restless legs syndrome and release the tension in the leg muscles. They also soothe random brain waves and help induce deep sleep in fibromyalgia patients. However, doctors avoid giving these drugs for very long as they can become addictive.

### ***Anti-seizure drug***

This helps to overcome pain, but has side effects like giddiness, bloating of hands and feet and an increase in weight, along with hazy vision. At present, the FDA has approved only one such drug, Lyrica, for treatment of fibromyalgia.

Doctors never prescribe narcotics for pain relief in fibromyalgia patients since it can result in drug abuse.

## **Alternative Therapies for Treating Fibromyalgia**

**Cognitive behavior therapy** channels the power within yourself to help fight fibromyalgia. It involves the use of positive thinking through inspirational tapes and group interactions to cope with fibromyalgia.

**Biofeedback** helps relieve pain by reducing the number of tender points.

**Trigger point injections** given at the tender points can alleviate the pain in some patients.

**Acupressure or acupuncture** done by an expert can ease the pain in some individuals.

**Massage therapy** done periodically can lessen the pain in a number of individuals.

Other patients respond well to occupational therapy or chiropractic sessions.

### **Exercise Regimen**

Patients with fibromyalgia can use the help of a trainer or therapist trained in pain relief to undergo regular exercise. A customized training program helps to release muscle tension, improve circulation and the action of the heart. Where possible, undertake some form of physical exercise at least two to three times a week.

### **Dealing with Stress**

Learn to handle tense situations with a relaxed mind, since worries can aggravate the pain of fibromyalgia. You can undergo counseling sessions that teach you to resist stress and lead a more peaceful professional and personal life.

The above program is a comprehensive plan to treat fibromyalgia. However, not all treatments work for everyone. There is often a process of trial and error.

The main thing is to hold your chin up and to learn to live with fibromyalgia.

## Part-VI: Prevention of Fibromyalgia

### Useful Tips for Preventing Fibromyalgia

About three to six percent of the population suffers from fibromyalgia. Women are more likely to get fibromyalgia than men. Since fibromyalgia is a chronic disease with no known cure, it may help to reduce our risk by adopting some lifestyle changes; change your diet, add exercise, subtract tension and you minimize the risk of getting fibromyalgia greatly.

#### 14 Tips to Reducing the Risk of Fibromyalgia.

**1. Modify Diet:** Eat fresh fruits and vegetables, proteins, cereals and whole grains. Eliminate processed foods like pizzas and other junk foods from your diet as they contain chemical additives that can cause symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Junk foods hurt your digestive system and add weight. Avoid alcohol, smoking and excessive coffee. These cause insomnia and disturbed sleep, a major symptom of fibromyalgia.

**2. Avoid Carbonated Drinks:** These extract calcium from the body when taken in excess and may harm the kidney and spleen. Lack of proper calcium may result in muscle spasms and pain, another symptom of fibromyalgia. Some people add calcium supplements to their diet and consume magnesium in prescribed doses to avoid fibromyalgia symptoms.

**3. Add Exercise:** Take some form of exercise to improve blood circulation in your body. If you have a dog, take him for a walk and enjoy the fresh air. You can do less strenuous exercises like yoga or tai chi that calm the mind while relaxing the body. Get the help of a trainer who can devise specific pain-relieving exercises for you.

**4. Get a Massage:** A massage is very relaxing as it relieves tension from the muscles. Ask a family member to massage sore muscles. Alternately, visit a trained masseur a few times regularly for sessions of soothing, not rigorous, massage.

**5. Relax:** Listen to soothing music and unwind with your favorite book. Take up meditation for half an hour daily and see the stress leave your body. Do not be always hyper-alert. Leave the brain free from mental activity for some part of the day. Avoiding stress helps minimize fibromyalgia symptoms.

**6. Herbal Supplements:** Some herbal supplements may help to overcome fibromyalgia signs and bring relief. Take good quality supplements from a known source if they help you in providing good sleep and alleviate the chronic pain of fibromyalgia. But, consult your doctor before taking them so that there is no harmful interaction between the two forms of medicine.

**7. Hydrotherapy:** Soak aching feet in warm water with Epsom Salts for pain relief. You can also try wrapping an ice pack around the aching region to reduce pain. Some people get comfort by taking a hot bath.

**8. Reduce Repetitive Work:** People who type continuously for long hours on the computer are prone to get fibromyalgia. So, take regular breaks to avoid straining the hand muscles.

**9. Get a Daily Dose of Sunlight:** In most offices, people work under artificial light without venturing into the natural sunlight for hours on end. Take a break from work and soak in the warm sunshine for a few minutes daily. This avoids depression and helps build up your bones.

**10. Turn off that Computer:** Continuously working on the computer can result in sensitivity to bright lights. Change the lighting in your work area and install a glare reducer on the computer screen. Studies show that light affects production of melatonin that controls sleep. Therefore, have optimum lighting in your environment for sound sleep.

**11. Have Sound Sleep:** Disturbed sleep and insomnia can result in fibromyalgia. You might consider, in consultation with your doctor, trying supplements or nutritional products that may help you to get proper sleep.

**12. Rest:** Take a power nap for a few minutes between your work tasks. This helps rejuvenate the mind and is extremely relaxing.

**13. Consult a Chiropractor:** He can relieve pain from aching feet and suggest remedies, like a cold pack to soothe sore neck muscles.

**14. Strengthen Your Immune System:** Fibromyalgia can be due to an immune system disorder. Consider reviewing, along with your doctor, natural foods and supplements that are claimed to boost the immune system.

## **Part-VII: Alternative and Complementary Therapies**

### **Natural Remedies to Help with Fibromyalgia**

While natural remedies are offered for fibromyalgia, many patients wisely stay with the prescription drugs. But, there may be side effects of these medicines at times.

For example, doctors prescribe sleeping pills to their patients to combat sleep disorder. These pills sometimes cause dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and increase depressive symptoms.

Similarly, antidepressants given to deter the side effects of sleeping pills may sometimes act adversely on your sleep mechanism and aggravate sleep disorder. They may also lead to gastrointestinal problems, impotence, and blurred vision.

Always report any such effects to your doctor who can reduce or alter your medication as required.

Some fibromyalgia patients look for natural remedies but always consult your doctor so that there are no problems of reaction with the medication you are prescribed.

Exercise helps to keep your body healthy. It has been established that women taking regular exercise experience less muscle and joint pain and feel greater control over their body.

While it is wrong to treat fibromyalgia as a psychological problem, much depends on an individual's attitude towards managing the disorder. Stress management is often overlooked, yet it is significant in treating fibromyalgia. Chronic stress results in excessive secretion of stress hormones, which adversely affect the HPA axis.

Fibromyalgia may be related to a defect in the oxidative phosphorylation, a biochemical pathway needed for appropriate functioning of the cell.

It may also be affected by malfunctioning of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis in some women.

The HPA axis plays a crucial role in controlling and balancing biochemical processes in the body. Appropriate dietary choices may help in maintaining the HPA axis and the oxidative phosphorylation.

Fibromyalgia impairs energy production by mitochondria. Magnesium is an essential element for mitochondrial action and many fibromyalgia patients suffer from magnesium deficiency. Providing a proper balance of the element may improve the condition of the patient.

Vitamin D deficiency can also trigger fibromyalgia symptoms and patients often register some improvement in their condition after supplementation.

It is useful to find out the actual factors behind Fibromyalgia symptoms and some patients may choose to opt for natural remedies where they are effective.



## Treating Fibromyalgia with Herbs

Fibromyalgia brings a lot of physical discomfort and you might find handling all the problems quite frustrating. Regular medicine may not relieve you from all the problems and some strong medication may also have certain side effects.

Searching for the best treatment is time-consuming and wearisome.

You may try herbal treatment for fibromyalgia but only do this with the full knowledge of your doctor.

Herbal supplements may prove useful in treating different types of disorders. Herbs, barks of trees, berries, etc. have been often used as a form of alternative medicine. In fact, herbal treatment forms part of the evolution of traditional medication.

Some people say that they prefer herbal treatment over conventional medication for any of several reasons:

Herbal medication aims at energizing the body in such a way that it is able to heal naturally.

Some people believe that there may be less side-effects.

It may be cheaper than conventional medication.

One herbal medicine may be promoted as a treatment for a number of problems, so people that believe the claims think they are saved from following extensive medication routines.

If you wish to opt for herbal treatment, consult your doctor first. Then, you might consult a homeopath. Many people believe that herbal medicines are completely devoid of side effects but it is not true. Some of these preparations may have very strong adverse effects.

### ***Cautions while using herbal remedies***

Do not choose higher potency drugs. They do not ensure faster recovery and may carry dangerous side effects.

Choose only a drug which has a record of proven success for the symptoms.

Take one dose and then wait for a while. Do not double the dose even if you feel it was not enough. Some herbal medicines take time to show their effects.

Always consult your doctor and a homeopath before starting herbal medications.

Herbal remedies may be effective for many symptoms varying from sleep disorder, fatigue and depression or extensive muscle pain according to those that provide them.

Depression is one of the most persistent problems of fibromyalgic patients. Over 50% of patients have been reported to suffer from it. St. John's Wort, a herb found almost everywhere is promoted as being effective in treating depression caused by fibromyalgia. It is said that it acts on neurotransmitters that affect mood and reduces anxiety and stress.

Cayenne is promoted as being effective for treating joint and muscle pain.

Cayenne is also said to act on neurotransmitters responsible for communicating pain signals. It contains capsaicin, which they say hinders the transmitters.

Cayenne also helps in decreasing inflammation.

Turmeric is also said to be useful in minimizing inflammation and pain if it is taken daily.

Some people also say that taking a Devil's claw root tablet regularly also reduces inflammation of the body.

Fibromyalgia debilitates the immune mechanism and may prevent the repair of essential tissues and muscles.

Echinacea, garlic and astragalus are said to help in improving circulation. Thus, nutrients and oxygen may flow properly throughout the body, which boost the immune system and reduces the symptoms associated with it.

Sleep disorder is yet another problem that grips almost all Fibromyalgia patients. Valerian and skullcap may be useful in restoring the normal sleep pattern.

Ginseng is another medicinal herb that may help in fighting the fatigue caused by sleep disorder and energizing the body.

High doses of calendula taken orally are said by some people to help in minimizing the effects of a number of symptoms caused by fibromyalgia.

Similarly, a combination of Turkish rhubarb, burdock, sheep sorrel, and slippery elm may also improve the condition of fibromyalgics.

Other medicinal herbs that are said to act on various Fibromyalgia symptoms are as follows:

Ginkgo biloba may help in improving brain function and circulation

Willow bark is used as a pain killer and to help reduce inflammation

Valerian, hops teas and passionflower are said to act as muscle-relaxants and possess sedating properties

Dong quai may be useful for reducing joint pain.

Black walnut may help to eradicate parasites.

Artichoke, milk thistle extract, turmeric and dandelion are said to help sound liver function.

Dandelion is used by some people who believe that it builds up connective tissues and minimizes the intensity and frequency of pain.

Siberian ginseng energizes the body and may help in reducing fatigue.

A fibromyalgia patient can also try beverages like ginger tea that is said to be a natural painkiller.

Similarly, teas brewed from dandelion, red clover and burdock root are promoted by some as helping quick healing. They say that the preparations may facilitate better immune function and are useful in cleansing the bloodstream.

Fibromyalgia have wide variety of choices in treating the disorder with natural remedies but always consult your doctor before buying or using any of these preparations.

## Treating Fibromyalgia with Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a popular form of alternative treatment. Acupuncture had its start in China more than three thousand years ago.

The theory behind acupuncture treatments is that ‘chi’ represents the body’s natural life force and it flows across specific meridians within your body. Any imbalance in the flow of ‘chi’ energy causes pain, ailments, and sickness.

Acupuncture deals with treating or restoring this flow of energy through insertion of thin needles at specific acupoints across your whole body.

Acupuncture therapists are qualified and licensed personnel. You need to give a brief history regarding your fibromyalgia ailment and details of other treatments.

The therapist checks your tongue and pulse to determine suitable acupoints for your treatment. Needle insertion at acupoints is not painful; instead, it causes a little dullness, numbness, or pinched feeling.

A normal session lasts for around twenty minutes. The number of sessions depends on the severity of your ailment.

Normally, a session leaves you feeling more relaxed, energized, and with less pain. However, individual responses depend on extent and severity of fibromyalgia.

In very rare occasions, there could be side effects like nausea, fatigue, headache or fainting.

### Benefits

Some studies seem to show positive responses to acupuncture treatment for relief from fibromyalgia symptoms. It normally takes a month for treatment to show results. You may find good relief from pain with substantial decrease in pain levels, reduction of depression, lowering of fatigue and a boost to your energy levels.

Acupuncture is claimed to be successful in relieving pain due to the release of natural body painkillers, endorphins, through insertion of the needles. This is said

to further block any pain impulses from reaching your brain and thereby translating into pain sensations.

Further, acupuncture needles are claimed to improve blood flow and the increased blood circulation improves muscular health.

### **Acupuncture Therapist**

Before starting with your acupuncture treatment, look for a qualified and experienced acupuncture therapist. You can ask your doctor for referrals and recommendations. Before starting, you can inquire about all your questions regarding your therapist and check all credentials.

If acupuncture is not done correctly, it could cause organ puncture, bleeding, and prove very painful.

## Treating Fibromyalgia with Vitamins and Supplements

The human body has an incredible ability to repair itself and one can help yourself by creating the necessary environment.

Treating fibromyalgia with supplements and vitamins may be helpful.

A system of wellness is essential while fighting fibromyalgia, and vitamins and supplements are recommended by some people to help.

A person affected from fibromyalgia can derive various benefits from vitamins and supplements. They provide the body with harmonious and natural balance that it may be deficient in.

Herbs, vitamins, and supplements have been part of the health world for ages, and the West is using more of these medicines. Some people suffering from fibromyalgia say that they see certain benefits when using vitamins and supplements.

People suffering from fibromyalgia have low serotonin levels in their blood. It is claimed that using a supplement like 5-HTP may increase the level. Consumption of 5-HTP 100 mg three times a day is claimed to lessen a few symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Some users also say that a low-level of thiamine (vitamin B1) and reduced activity of the enzymes that are dependent on thiamine are one of the features of fibromyalgia. However, it is still yet to be confirmed whether such things occur.

A study was carried out on people suffering with fibromyalgia where the patients were treated with Vitamin E with amounts ranging from 100-300 IU/day. The results were satisfactory for some, dramatic at times but not conclusive.

Other studies seem to show that, when Intravenous S-adenosylmethionine was prescribed to people with fibromyalgia, they reported reduction in depression and pain in two double-blind trials. However, with the short trial there was no consistent benefit observed.

Vitamin C may help to reduce swelling and possibly enhances the immune system.

Coenzyme Q10 may help a better delivery of oxygen and antioxidant activity.

B-vitamins have claimed to help lower the stress levels.

These are some of the supplements that some people believe work and help lessen the effects of fibromyalgia.

But, it is essential that you see your physician before you start self-medication.

## Treating Fibromyalgia with Traditional Chinese Medicine

Fibromyalgia, according to Chinese medicine, is a condition due to weakness in the kidney, spleen, liver, and heart that is caused by strain, stress, inadequate sleep, and insufficient nutrient supplement in the diet.

Generally, the Chinese medicine practitioner assesses the patient first to determine the imbalances.

Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture have claimed to help in controlling pain, improving the quality of sleep, increasing energy and decreasing other symptoms.

Fibromyalgia is also called Painful Obstruction Syndrome. Possible causes of such a syndrome may include pathogenic influences such as wind, dampness, and cold. These conditions penetrate one's body to cause stiffness, causing pain and inflicting pain.

The Qi is considered strong enough not to let the environmental pathogen's invasion. However, any disharmony in Qi and blood can lead to this syndrome.

Traditional Chinese medicine diagnoses Bi syndrome with the prevalence of cold, wind, and damp symptoms. These three pathogenic factors are mostly found together; it is the wind that carries the others to the body. However, there are symptoms that separate one from the others.

**Wind Bi:** It is the prevalence of wind when a pain shows as acute pain that starts and quickly ends, and flows in the different parts of the body. The patient may dislike wind, have a tongue with a thin white coating apart from its normal color. The patient may also have a floating pulse.

**Cold Bi:** Cold prevails and the pain is quite severe. The pain is restricted to certain areas. The patient may dislike cold, have a tight pulse and a white coating on their tongue.



**Damp Bi:** Dampness predominates and the pain is sore, mostly with a heavy feeling and with numbness at times. The areas of the pain are fixed and the patient often complains of swelling.

## **Dietary Therapy for Fibromyalgia**

The best diet for fibromyalgia patients depends on their individual symptoms. You may only follow the guidelines given below after consulting your physician.

Our aim is to provide suggestions that may provide a better diet for fibromyalgia patients. If you find that any of your symptoms worsen, it is advisable that you adapt your diet.

However, research show there is no definite diet plan treatment for fibromyalgia; the same food may be a great thing for some, whereas it might aggravate the condition in others.

### **Fibromyalgia Diet Guidelines**

#### ***Carbohydrates***

A common suggestion for fibromyalgia sufferers is to avoid refined carbohydrates.

1. Avoid food that has refined carbs like cakes, white breads, muffins, sweets, doughnuts, cereals that are processed. You may eat wholegrain bread, oats, rye, traditional granola, and oatmeal.
2. Instead of artificial sweeteners, use table sugar cautiously. Minimize your sugar intake to forty grams per two thousand calories.
3. Your dietary fiber should be limited to fourteen grams per one thousand calories. It should be soluble fiber like oats, legumes, apples, etc., rather than the insoluble ones like bran.
4. Your intake of carbohydrate should vary between 30-35% of your total calories.

#### ***Fats***

Fibromyalgia sufferers should have omega-3 fats in their diet.

1. Your saturated fat might be less than 10%. Saturated fats lead to pain and inflammation. Avoid saturated fats in beef, cheese, ice cream, oils, milk, cookies, mayonnaise, margarine, potato chips, frozen yogurt, popcorn, etc.

2. Your cholesterol amount per day should be less than 300 mg per day.
3. Lessen your intake of trans fats; for example - cookies, cakes, pies, crackers, animal products, bread, fried potatoes, margarine, corn chips, shortening, etc.
4. Omega-3 essential fatty acids are healthy components of flax seed, oily fish like cod or liver oil.
5. Your total fat intake should be not more than 20 to 35% of calories. Consume monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats from nuts, fish and vegetable oils. Choose poultry, meat, dry beans, milk or milk products – focus on low fat, lean, or fat-free types.
6. Avoid food that is fried and eat baked, broiled, and sautéed food instead.

### ***Protein***

1. Red meat is believed by some to be not healthy for fibromyalgia patients because these meats are high on saturated fats. Eat fish and vegetable protein, like legumes, soybeans, etc.
2. Before you eat poultry or meat, it is best to remove all the skin and visible fats.
3. Your intake of protein should be 20-40% of your total calories.
4. Avoid meats that are processed in salt, smoked or nitrate-cured.

### ***Fruits and Vegetables***

1. Eat more whole fruits than just their juices.
2. Include in your diet fruits like strawberries, kiwis, peaches, raspberries, mango, and melon.
3. Include apple in your diet as this fruit has anti-inflammatory qualities.
4. Vegetables form a very important part of the diet. Eat more carrots, sweet potato, spinach, kale, squash, broccoli, brussels sprouts, and cabbage.

### ***Dairy Foods***

Enjoy cow's milk (if you can tolerate it) or soymilk, but choose reduced fat or fat-free varieties. The same applies to yogurt and cheese. Remember, regular cheese contains more fat (including saturated fat) than regular beef.

### ***Healthy Drinks***

1. Make it a habit to drink at least eight glasses of water every day. You may take herbal teas and fruit juices that are diluted. Intake of liquid is essential to flush out the toxins from the body.

2. Your tea and coffee intake should be limited. It will be even better if you eliminate them from your diet.

Alcohol and caffeine encourage fatigue and may increase pain in the muscles.

3. Eliminate sodas; avoid soft drinks and drinks that are high in caffeine and sugar.

### ***Healthy Snacks***

1. Eat more unsalted nuts, chopped vegetables and seeds in your snacks everyday.

2. Keep away from commercial snacks except for air popped corn, which is sodium free.

3. Keep away from candies and chocolates.

### ***Junk Food***

Fast-food is not a wise choice of food for fibromyalgia sufferers. Fast foods are high in sodium, fat and calories and have very low nutritional values.

### ***Artificial Sweeteners***

It is advisable to avoid food that has saccharine, aspartame, etc. These may aggravate the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

### ***Sodium (Salt) and Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)***

The MSG and salt content in your food should always be low. Many processed foods have these additives, so check the nutrients label very carefully before buying your food.

### **Healthy Eating Habits**

1. The number of meals we have and their timing through the day may affect our fibromyalgia symptoms.
2. Eat light meals in the evening to reduce some digestive complications.
3. Eat small and regular meals to maintain a regular supply of energy and nutrients to your muscles.

## Yoga Therapy for Fibromyalgia

Yoga is a combination of mental and physical exercises for increasing physical strength and mental endurance to achieve extreme relaxation in mind and body. Yoga had its origins in India many thousands of years ago. It is gaining increasing popularity among western nations for its beneficial effects.

### Yoga and Fibromyalgia

Practicing simple and easy yoga postures can bring benefits for fibromyalgia sufferers. It reduces muscular pain and relieves depression. It increases your stamina and strength, causing better mood regulation. It shows positive effects on your sleeping patterns and improves concentration levels.

Yoga can be easy and helpful, as you do not need any special equipment or accessories.

Although you can practice yoga any time of the day, it is best to do at dawn or dusk, even just before going to bed to ensure sound sleep.

Overall, yoga relaxes muscles, improves blood circulation and relieves mental tension from your stressed nerves.

It allows free oxygen to circulate within your body, thereby revitalizing you.

You can choose simple yogic postures to start. Practice as little as five to ten minutes daily. Keep increasing your time gradually to where you can do an hour's yoga daily. You can tailor yoga to suit your requirements and develop within your stamina levels. Yoga postures are simple and many are easy to perform. You can practice them within the comfort of your home.

### ***Special Tips***

While practicing yoga, monitor your exercise according to your body's needs. Do not continue if you feel excessive pain or discomfort. Ease your stretching or do simpler exercises.

Maintain a specific list of postures that you do daily. Continue with these unless they are difficult to perform. Try going ahead little by little and do not overburden your body with too much on any day.

You may not be able to get perfect posture right at the start. Although it can prove challenging, stick to specific yogic postures like Tree or Downward Dog for possible relief from fibromyalgia symptoms.

## Fibromyalgia and Exercise

Fibromyalgia is specific medical state that causes pain in ligaments, joints, muscles, and similar muscular tissues. Symptoms range from stiffness, chest pains, abdominal pain, headaches, depression, swelling, insomnia, and fatigue. This syndrome is most common in women between ages of twenty-five and forty-five. However, it is not life threatening.

### Exercise and Fibromyalgia

It may sound out of place that exercise can deliver positive results for all your discomfort due to fibromyalgia. The ailment by itself causes discomfort and pain. However, combating pain with exercise is a good option. Exercise can reduce pain by improving flexibility and improving muscular strength and endurance.

A feeling of overall well-being promotes better mental health and relieves symptoms of depression. Exercise helps you out of your sedentary status. Starting with low-intensity exercises is the best remedy instead of burdening your body with strenuous and painful exercises right at the start.

### Simple Exercises Best Suited for Fibromyalgia

**Walking:** This is one of the low-intensity exercises. Start by walking for five minutes on the first day. Increase your time by one minute per day until you are able to walk for forty-five to sixty minutes without any major discomfort.

**Swimming:** It is one of the best exercises for your entire body and has a soothing and calming effect on your physical and mental self. Fibromyalgia sufferers can get best results by swimming in a warm pool, ideally with temperatures around eighty degrees. Cold water could cause further stiffness of muscles. Swimming for around thirty-five minutes once or twice a week is good. You can start with smaller durations to achieve specific time limit.

**Yoga:** It involves building up different yogic postures with proper breathing techniques to improve flexibility, endurance, and free circulation of oxygen and blood throughout your body and brain. You achieve specific postures through gentle movement of limbs and strive to maintain postures for limited duration.



**Jogging:** Start with jogging after you are able to practice walking comfortably thrice or twice a week. You can start by jogging for a small stretch, alternating between walking and jogging.

**Bicycling:** Cycling on stationary bike or cycle, within your house, is a good form of exercise. Keep a target of sixty minutes and try achieving it slowly.

### ***Precautions***

Always listen to your body for any excessive strain, pain, or discomfort. Although you should start all your exercises immediately, going slow is a good remedy. Allow your body to get accustomed to your exercise schedules and then you will find it easy.

You can choose any form of exercise according to your convenience. The important factor is that you should exercise, thereby doing away with sedentary lifestyle. Exercises do away with all your pain and discomfort, although it could take some time. You start feeling better and have greater control over your body and mind.

## Part-VIII: Coping with Fibromyalgia

### Twenty Tips to Help You Deal with Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia affects your muscles, ligaments, joints, soft tendons, and similar muscular tissue. It thereby causes excessive pain and associated fatigue with an overall sense of ill-being translating into depression and poor mental happiness.

#### ***Tips That Help You Deal With Fibromyalgia***

**Exercises:** Graded exercises deliver good results overtime. Simple exercises like walking, jogging, swimming, and other aerobics prove useful.

**Diet:** Maintaining a healthy diet with lots of fiber, fresh vegetables, fruits, and low animal fat is good to reduce cramps and muscular spasms. A nutritious diet keeps your weight in control and thereby reduces extra pressure on your legs.

**Yoga:** Yoga involves formation of specific postures with your hands and legs. These simple movements relieve pains and allow body to release endorphins, body's natural painkillers.

**Meditation:** Meditation helps improve your concentration. You try to focus on any positive aspect or feature to create a harmonious feeling within you. This relieves depression associated with fibromyalgia.

**Stay away from allergens:** There are few common allergens associated with fibromyalgia like wheat, corn, diary, sugar, soy, citrus, and nuts. Studies reveal these cause pain, discomfort, and distressing symptoms. Gradual reduction and total elimination of these foods can produce positive results.

**Sleep:** Sound sleep is essential to relieve pain. Improvements prove slow with disturbed and insufficient sleep patterns. Relax and keep away disturbing thoughts before going to bed to promote good and sound sleep.

**Omega-3 fatty acids:** Consume these as available in coldwater fish or take supplements for relief from all types of pain and discomfort associated with fibromyalgia.

**Stress Reduction:** Stress in any form, be it physical or mental is harmful for fibromyalgia patients. Reduce stress by adopting stress reduction techniques like deep breathing, hypnosis, meditation, muscular relaxation, or biofeedback.

**Chiropractic Manipulation:** These involve manipulation of muscles and spinal tissues to relieve pain. Elderly patients find little relief from symptoms through this technique.

**Acupuncture:** This Chinese alternative treatment involves insertion of needles at specific defined points in body to relieve your pain or discomfort. This promotes free flow of body energy, Chi.

**Massage Therapy:** Massage stimulates muscles and nerves. Massaging area that pains can bring in lot of relief and comfort. This lowers stress levels and thereby negates symptoms of fibromyalgia.

**Do away with Additives:** Additives contain monosodium glutamate and artificial sweeteners. These stimulate your nerves and cause hypertension. Excessive pressure on your nerves could prove harmful and disturbing.

**Herbal Remedies:** These simple remedies like melatonin, collagen hydrolysate, and other natural supplements can bring down pain and inflammation.

**Medications:** Simple medications can help bring in relief and reduce pain, thereby producing overall well-being. Medications may not bring in similar relief to all. Taking small doses as soon as pain sets in can create wonders. However, all pain medication should be with doctor’s prescription.

**Technological Aids:** Take advantage of technological features like headsets, voice-activated software, and similar more to restrict extensive and prolonged use of your limbs. These help you attend to your regular work without causing strain.

**Hot Packs:** Make good use of hot packs to get relief from your pain. Place hot water bags, rice bags, or similar packs at pain joints to lower pain and discomfort. It peeps your mental quotient by relaxing muscles.

**Pace Activities:** Schedule your activities so that you do not feel overburdened on any day. Allow yourself sufficient time to go through all activities albeit slowly. Excessive work or no work is both harmful and distressing.

**Laughter:** Fibromyalgia causes many changes in your lifestyle and priorities. Try to keep your humor intact and do not brood. Relax and laugh out aloud. It relieves tension and makes you feel light and happy. Enjoy life by watching funny movies or lighthearted shows. Do not go into a shell. Instead, try mixing and spending time with friends and family as much as possible.

**Optimism:** Keep a brave front and always look to the positive side of things. This brings in contentment and happiness. This reduces depression, anxiety, and similar stress. Positive attitude can bring down fibromyalgia symptoms extensively.

**Keep yourself Informed:** Scout the Internet and medical journals for all information about fibromyalgia. Keep yourself informed and prepared for all types of symptoms for quick recovery.

Fibromyalgia causes long-term symptoms. Although these tips can help you deal with various symptoms, it cannot spell complete cure and relief from the ailment as a whole. However, adhering to such tips can go a long way in reducing effects of fibromyalgia. Going slow with these tips is good rather than rushing and further accelerating all symptoms. Overtime, it becomes a regular feature and you find yourself following same routine even if you have recovered from most symptoms.

## Part-IX: Fibromyalgia FAQ

### **Fibromyalgia – Frequently Asked Questions**

#### ***What is fibromyalgia?***

Fibromyalgia is a clinical condition that causes excessive fatigue, muscular pain, and tenderness in tissues. Symptoms differ across different people with differences in intensity.

#### ***Fibromyalgia affects whom?***

Fibromyalgia is most common in women, although men could also develop this condition. It commonly affects women during teenage and childbearing age. Further, people with arthritis, rheumatism, or spondylitis stand a greater risk.

#### ***What are the common symptoms of fibromyalgia?***

Common symptoms include muscular pain all over body, depression, disturbed sleep, headaches, and tiredness all-day through, poor memory, weakness, dizziness, constipation, diarrhea, and tingling of hands and feet.

#### ***What causes fibromyalgia?***

There is no specific cause for fibromyalgia. There are different theories like low hormonal levels in body, disordered sleep patterns causing insufficient sleep, increase of pain-related chemicals in nervous system due to different medications, and similar more.

#### ***How can fibromyalgia be diagnosed?***

There are no x-rays, diagnostic tests, or other ways of diagnosing fibromyalgia. It is purely according to analysis of symptoms.

#### ***What are the different types of fibromyalgia?***

There are two major types of fibromyalgia. These are primary and secondary. Primary fibromyalgia is most universally accepted form. Secondary fibromyalgia is mainly due to other specific conditions like hypothyroidism, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, physical trauma, or HIV.

### ***Can diagnostic tests throw any light on fibromyalgia?***

Although there are no specific tests to diagnose fibromyalgia, certain tests like CBC and ECR can rule out other possible disorders like thyroid function, hypoglycemia, and anemia.

### ***What aggravates fibromyalgia fibro fog?***

Fibro fog is a specific state of mental confusion and loss of memory. This state faces aggravation due to physical changes like excessive humidity, cold, too much physical activity or inactivity, anxiety, sleeplessness, or hormonal fluctuations.

### ***Does fibromyalgia cause dermal skin disorders?***

Fibromyalgia causes excessive sweating, body rashes, itching, small bumps and blisters, rosacea, brittle nails, and dermatitis.

### ***Does sedentary lifestyle cause fibromyalgia?***

Not necessarily, although fibromyalgia causes pain, fatigue, and discomfort, it becomes difficult for such people to adhere to a specific physical routine. However, being sedentary causes muscles to slop and reduces blood flow. This increases stiffness, overall depression, and fatigue, which overtime develop into fibromyalgia.

### ***How can I improve quality of sleep?***

Fibromyalgia patients often suffer from sleep disorders like poor sleep, irregular sleeping patterns. You can improve quality of sleep by making your sleeping environment conducive to sleep. Make it free of disturbing sounds and distractions. Do not have any caffeine before going to bed. Restrict use of sugar, alcohol, and others. Practice relaxation exercises to induce sound sleep.

### ***Does fibromyalgia have long-term effects?***

Medications, relaxation techniques, and similar treatment options can reduce effects of fibromyalgia extensively. However, stress at any time in life can aggravate symptoms. Treating causes of stress can bring relief without any use of medications.

***What are the most suitable exercises for fibromyalgia?***

Aerobic exercises for half an hour each day or four times a week can prove very helpful. Simple exercises as walking, cycling, swimming, jogging, and yoga improve blood circulation and free flow of oxygen. Choose exercise that suits you the most to overcome simple symptoms of fibromyalgia.

***What medications are best for fibromyalgia?***

Medications inducing sleep prove most helpful. Antidepressant medications, Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and muscle relaxants bring relief. Sleeping pills can cause more harm than benefit. Although most of these drugs can cause side effects, it is best to take these under medical supervision.

## Afterword from Anton

I wrote this book with the expectation that gathering this information all in one place would be helpful to everyone that has fibromyalgia or has a family member with the condition.

I hope that this book has helped and, as far as possible, reassured you as well as protecting you from the rumors and myths about the condition and its effects that circulate.

I believe that, sometimes, the best thing you can do is to add little laughter to your life and share it with those around you.

A smile can be most effective medicine we have.

Because there is a lot of continuing research into fibromyalgia and its effects, there will be new treatments produced that I have no knowledge of at this time.

So, keep in touch with your doctor and don't hold any information or questions back – the more information you share, the better that your doctor can help you.

Best Wishes,

Anton Weeding.



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