

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic condition with widespread pain and fatigue. There are over 3 million people in the U.S. diagnosed with FM. Over 80% of people with FM are female and most are adults. However, FM can occur in both children and in men.

The symptoms usually “wax and wane”, or increase and decrease over time. The chance of remission is better if a person has had FM for a short time.

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) has identified criteria for the diagnosis of FM. In order for FM to be diagnosed, widespread pain must be present for 3 or more months with 11 of 18 tender points present and pain in the upper and lower body and right and left sides. Patients with FM often have other symptoms in addition to pain, such as fatigue, muscle stiffness, depression, or anxiety. Sleep and/or concentration can be affected.

It often takes two or more years for someone with FM to be diagnosed. There are many reasons that this occurs. Some healthcare providers are not familiar with the factors indicating FM. Some may not recognize FM as a “real disease”. Since the symptoms of FM are not constant, it may take more than one visit for the provider to identify FM.

The good news is that there are treatments for FM. Providers commonly use a combination of treatments to help relieve the pain, fatigue, stiffness, and sleep disturbances of FM. For the treatment to work, you need to be an active partner in the plan and to have realistic expectations. It is important that you and your healthcare provider communicate well.

This pamphlet has been created to help you be an active partner in your care. FM is usually chronic, so it is important that you and your healthcare provider work together over time for the best results.

The term healthcare provider (or provider) commonly includes persons such as a nurse practitioner (NP), physicians (MD or DO), and physician assistant (PA).

Talking to Your Healthcare Provider:

You should tell your provider when you experience a new problem or a change in your health. It is helpful to make notes before your visit to help you describe:

- The symptoms you are having
- When the symptoms started
- Any self-treatments you have tried
- Whether the symptoms are getting better or worse
- Anything that makes the symptoms better or worse (resting, medications, exercise, etc)
- Whether the symptoms affect your usual activities (walking, sleeping, working, etc)

Each time you visit your healthcare provider, you should:

- Take a list so that you will be ready to share
 - any current symptoms or problems
 - whether your symptoms interfere with your day-to-day activities
 - all medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal agents, and supplements
 - any other providers you are seeing
- Ask all of your questions and say if you do not understand the answers to your questions
- Take notes to help you remember treatments or recommendations
- Ask when you should follow-up/make another appointment

FM Treatment:

A major part of FM treatment involves educating you and your family and/or friends about the nature of the condition, how it is treated, and what to expect. Having FM can be very frustrating because there may be no visible signs of the disease, although you have symptoms which limit your abilities. Part of the education will be to help you understand FM and its treatment. Part of the education will be to help you cope with the condition and the symptoms.

FM Medications:

A number of medications are used to treat FM. FDA-approved medications include pregabalin, duloxetine, and milnacipran. However, providers usually use a combination of medications to manage FM symptoms. For instance, sleep disturbances are often treated by medications such as tricyclic antidepressants and other sleep aids. Pain is often treated with non-narcotic medications such as tramadol. Muscle relaxants may be used if muscle spasms are a problem. While FM is not a result of depression, many patients with FM develop depression or anxiety, which may require medications to treat.

Other Treatments:

In addition to medications, there are many other important measures. These include:

- Low intensity aerobic exercise such as walking and pool exercise
- Balancing rest and activity
- Implementing actions to promote sleep
- Muscle strengthening and stretching exercises
- Therapeutic baths (balneotherapy)
- Massage therapy
- Biofeedback
- Acupuncture
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When New Treatments are Recommended:

You will likely have new treatments prescribed from time-to-time. For any new medication or other treatment, make sure that you understand how it should be taken. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist to answer any questions that you have. Be sure to read the medication handout provided by the pharmacist. It is important that you know:

- What the medication (or treatment) is supposed to do.
- Whether the medication replaces another one that should be stopped.
- How long it be taken.
- The best time to take it (for example at bedtime or with meals).
- Whether there any possible side effects.
- Any other options that should be considered.

Referrals and Consultations:

Your provider may consult with other specialists or refer you for evaluation and/or treatment. For example people with FM may benefit from being evaluated and/or treated at sleep centers or pain management practices, as well as by mental health counselors, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.

Resources:

Fibromyalgia Information Foundation

- <http://www.myalgia.com/index.html>

Fibromyalgia Network:

- <http://www.fmnetnews.com/>

National Fibromyalgia Association

- <http://www.fmaware.org/>

FibroHope

- <http://www.fibrohope.org/>

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Fibromyalgia Is Treatable:

Working with Your Healthcare Provider

