

FIBROMYALGIA BACK PAINS:

What You Need To Know

by

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Patients' faced with the diagnosis of Fibromyalgia are many times left confused by this mysterious disease. This can result in patients feeling lost and confused wondering "what is wrong with me." This is complicated by the fact that many health care professionals know little about this problem or what might be of help for it. The information presented here is only a brief overview of this disorder. Use this as the start of your quest to find out more about this important and prevalent disorder.

DIAGNOSING FIBROMYALGIA:

- Fibromyalgia is a condition that was not known until a few short years ago.
- The term means pain in the muscles, ligaments and tendons, or the fibrous tissues of the body.
- The term implies "inflammation" though this is not the case.
- It's an illness that causes its victims to ache all over, and it can produce widespread muscle and joint pain.
- In addition, the normal sleep/wake cycle is disrupted and this leaves fibromyalgia patients with an overwhelming fatigue.
- Recent research has demonstrated that the brain pain centers are highly sensitive to pain signals.
- It is diagnosed because of **widespread pain, tenderness, sleep disturbance, fatigue, headaches**, morning stiffness, muscle twitching, and period "burning" of the muscles.
- It is considered to be present when there is wide-spread pain in all four body quadrants, & tenderness to palpation at 11 of 18 tender-point sites--many in the joint areas
- It is more frequent in women than men, **though it is thought to be frequent in anyone who "carries" many emotional & physical burdens and pressures.**

TRAUMA & FIBROMYALGIA:

- The onset of Fibromyalgia frequently can be traced to a time where the individual experienced either a physical or psychological trauma.
- Child Abuse, Domestic Abuse, trauma's of having an accident or injury which has created a traumatic response also have been identified as causative factors in this disorder.
- It also seems to be connected to those individuals who have "over-worked" their bodies for a number of years.
- Past unresolved traumatic experiences can make a patient more prone to developing it.
- Frequently these symptoms come on some time after having experienced a trauma.
- Stress plays a major part in the exacerbation (i.e., severity increase) in symptoms and problems in functioning.
- Fibromyalgia is also found in children. Many adults who are diagnosed with this disorder remember struggling with back pain for many years as a child never knowing what was "wrong" with them and having others tell them that it is "all in their head."

DOES THIS MEAN IT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL?

- It is important to note that Fibromyalgia is a physical disorder that seems to be related to the dysregulation of the central nervous system.
- We now know that the same center in the brain that is responsible for the regulation of pain is the SAME center of the brain that is responsible for the regulation of moods.
- The important question is not so much what has caused this disorder. It is more important to focus on what it is that one can control.
- We also know that having chronic pain, a condition that lasts more than 3-6 months, is in itself a risk factor for developing depressive and anxiety problems.
- Research observations using functional MRI's (fMRI) have shown that the brains of Fibromyalgia patients are more sensitive to "felt-sensations" of pain and stimulation.

- What this suggests is that an important focus of treatment must include a Behavioral Medicine approach to care, not only to help with the emotional arousal issues, but also to learn new skills in being able to manage this condition over time.

ASSOCIATED FEATURES OF FIBROMYALGIA:

- Many other symptoms are also part of this disorder.
- Many patients with Fibromyalgia suffer with a chronic sleep disorder which at the same time results in the patient having even more symptoms and pain.
- An irritable bowel syndrome is also frequently associated with this disorder.
- A sense of chronic exhaustion can come on for what appears to be no particular reason.
- It is normal to expect that the person suffering with this disorder will have problems in completing household tasks on a consistent basis.
- Issues of “Fibro-Fog” are also evident in patients who find themselves fighting to keep themselves focused, oriented, and directed in any consistent manner. They feel disconnected from the “real world” and wonder what is happening to them. Everything seems to be “in a fog” and not very clear—including their thinking and reasoning.
- Many, but not all, Fibromyalgia patients find themselves unable to work on any consistent basis and find themselves being totally disabled, lost and confused about what to do to help themselves.
- Others have little understanding for the symptoms experienced by Fibromyalgia patients as they “look so normal” and have no evidence of any obvious injury or physical disability.
- Fear of the unknown is central to all chronic pain disorders.
- Fear of movement is a critical factor in all chronic pain patients because of a concern that this will result in an increase in disability and the maintaining of pain behaviors.
- Therefore, it is important to know that fear can be adaptive or it can block one from being able to adapt to changing life conditions.
- This can be complicated because it is known that when people are faced with crises, it

can bring up memories of past unresolved crises and problems.

TREATMENT & FIBROMYALGIA:

- **Effective treatment must involve both behavioral/psychological and physical approaches to managing pains.**
- **Improvement is a step-by-step process, with periods of relapses and flare-ups, which require the patient being active in their own care.**
- The course of treatment can be slow and take time with a large focus on being able to manage one's pain over time.
- **There is no "cure"** and the patient must understand how they can reduce the pains, manage problems, and **use pain management ideas--which includes regular exercise!** However, strength training may only worsen Fibromyalgia.
- A major focus in **improving the quality of sleep** (Stage 4 sleep), by many methods including learning relaxation techniques.
- The use of anti-depressant medications can be useful in improving sleep patterns (they improve REM/Dream sleep), reduces pain, along with reducing one's perception of pain. "Sleep medications" may actually make things worse since they interfere with REM sleep patterns.
- **Exercise, stretching, biofeedback**, physical therapy, Myofascial trigger point soft-tissue self-care techniques, and rest help. Pilates (pih-LAH-teez) exercises are excellent for the syndrome.
- Not all physical therapy is helpful. You need a therapist who knows Manual ("hands-on") techniques rather than just a focus on exercise and strengthening techniques.
- **Education** about one's condition/problem is vital to management.
- **Learning to pace** one's self, and one's activities, is vital. Fibromyalgia is more prominent in "high-achieving" and "perfectionistic" people who continue to push themselves and feel that their identity is based on "doing and being in control."
- **Behavioral/psychological therapy** is helpful in learning active self-care techniques, exploring problems, and in changing responses.

- Setting a timer to go off every 20 minutes helps one to remember to stop what is being done, to take time to stretch, and to have **frequent breaks**.
- Pain can lead to inactivity, deconditioning, sleep problems, and increased pains. Further, ***inactivity also can cause more pain and makes the pain worse. Walking daily is critical to having less pain.***
- **Caffeine, alcohol, drugs, and overuse** of pain medications, can increase pains because of the stimulant, vascular-constrictive, and central nervous system (CNS) depressant effects of pain medications or alcohol.
- **Myofascial soft-tissue techniques**, trigger point techniques & stretching are essential to managing pains and improving one's functioning.
- ***Fibromyalgia does not have to leave you as disabled--unless you want to find support for being and staying disabled. However, if you work on it there will be positive changes and things you can reverse so you can live as normal of a life as possible.***
- One has to remain active. Start slowly. Though you may not want to do anything, it is important to slowly develop an activity routine if you are to effectively manage the Fibromyalgia symptoms!
- It is critical to not force the patient to do too much. Work schedules may have to be adjusted in order to keep the severity of symptoms under control. This can be difficult because supervisors do not understand this condition or that it is a "real medical problem." However, Fibromyalgia is a REAL and serious disease that requires awareness of multiple pain management techniques and approaches for this chronic condition.
- **Symptoms are signs & warnings to tell us that something is out of balance in our lives. They are there to slow us up, to make us pay attention to issues we deny and avoid, and they force us to start to deal with other issues in our lives we have avoided facing. If one only focuses on the pain symptoms and "finding the cure," the underlying psychological/personality style issues will be missed causing only more pain and suffering and a lack of any resolution of the pain problems.**
- The problem is that we live in a society that values "hard work," pulling oneself up by the "bootstraps," along with "sucking it in" and "pushing harder."

- This condition requires a different approach.
- Activity is important, but it is important that one pace themselves and not overdo activities on the days when feeling better. This only insures a major setback and increase in pain the next few days.

Cure vs Management:

- Most patients naturally want to have their “former lives” back without any further pain and suffering.
- The problem is that “the search for the cure” leads only to dead ends and false hoping.
- The “magic” in pain treatment is not a pill, but learning to “manage” it over time.
- Pain Management means that one has to learn active techniques to daily manage one’s pain.
- Once pain problems enter one’s life, everything has changed requiring a new way of adapting and thinking.
- Acceptance of the condition is critical--not to become a passive victim, but to focus on what needs to be done now to manage this condition so that one can remain functional even with limitations and continuing pain problems.

Remember that the most important thing to know in pain management techniques is that “management” is the magic word. Chronic pains are managed rather than cured! This requires knowledge and the development of self-care skills.

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For more information, visit
www.arthritis.org or call (618) 993-1777.

On the Web: Arthritis Foundation, www.arthritis.org.

Fibromyalgia Network, <http://www.fmnetnews.com>.

National Fibromyalgia Association, www.fmaware.org

At the Bookstore: The Arthritis Foundation Guide to Good Living with Fibromyalgia, The Arthritis Foundation.

Fibromyalgia: An Essential Guide for Patients and Families, by Daniel J. Wallace and Janice Brock Wallace.

Fibromyalgia: A leading expert's guide to understanding and getting relief from the pain that won't go away, by Don L Goldenberg.

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