

FIBROMYALGIA (FMS)



Fibromyalgia, also called fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS), is a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body.

CAUSES OF FIBROMYALGIA (FMS)

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown, but it's thought to be related to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves) processes pain messages carried around the body.

It's also suggested that some people are more likely to develop fibromyalgia because of genes inherited from their parents.

In many cases, the condition appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event, such as:

- An injury or infection
- Giving birth
- Having an operation
- The breakdown of a relationship
- The death of a loved one

SYMPTOMS OF FIBROMYALGIA

As well as increased pain, people with fibromyalgia may also have:

- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Muscle stiffness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Problems with mental processes (known as "fibro-fog") – such as problems with memory and concentration
- Headaches
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) – a digestive condition that causes stomach pain and bloating
- Other symptoms that people with fibromyalgia sometimes experience include:
 - Dizziness and clumsiness

- Feeling too hot or too cold – this is because you're not able to regulate your body temperature properly
- An overwhelming urge to move your legs (restless legs syndrome)
- Tingling, numbness, prickling or burning sensations in your hands and feet (pins and needles, also known as paraesthesia)
- In women, unusually painful periods
- Anxiety
- Depression

DEPRESSION

In some cases, having the condition can lead to depression.

This is because fibromyalgia can be difficult to deal with, and low levels of certain hormones associated with the condition can make you prone to developing depression.

THOSE AFFECTED BY FIBROMYALGIA

Anyone can develop fibromyalgia, although it affects around seven times as many women as men. The condition typically develops between the ages of 30 and 50, but can occur in people of any age, including children and the elderly.

It's not clear exactly how many people are affected by fibromyalgia, although research has suggested it could be a relatively common condition. Some estimates suggest nearly 1 in 20 people may be affected by fibromyalgia to some degree.

One of the main reasons it's not clear how many people are affected is because fibromyalgia can be a difficult condition to diagnose. There's no specific test for the condition, and the symptoms can be similar to a number of other conditions.

TREATMENT OF FIBROMYALGIA

Although there's currently no cure for fibromyalgia, there are treatments to help relieve some of the symptoms and make the condition easier to live with.

Treatment tends to be a combination of:

- Medication – such as antidepressants and painkillers.
- Talking therapies – such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling
- lifestyle changes – such as exercise.
- Programmes and relaxation techniques.
- Exercise in particular has been found to have a number of important benefits for people with fibromyalgia, including helping to reduce pain.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Many people with fibromyalgia find that support groups provide an important network where they can talk to others living with the condition.

[Fibromyalgia Action UK](#) is a charity that offers information and support to people with fibromyalgia. If you have any questions about fibromyalgia, call the charity's helpline on 0844 887 2444.

The charity also has a network of local support groups you may find helpful and an online community, where you can find out news, events and ongoing research into the condition.

Another support group you may find useful is [UK Fibromyalgia](#).

SOURCE:

NHS – available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fibromyalgia/>

FURTHER READING:

Fibromyalgia Action UK: Employee's Guide for fibromyalgia in the workplace - <http://www.fmauk.org/information-packs-mainmenu-58/booklet-mainmenu-135/1366-employee-s-guide>