

Condition:



Fibromyalgia

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What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a common condition where you experience widespread pain, tenderness and fatigue. The pain tends to be felt as diffuse aching or burning and may be worse at some times than at others. It may also change location, usually becoming more severe in parts of the body that are used most. The fatigue ranges from feeling tired, to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness.

Fibromyalgia in itself doesn't cause any lasting damage to the body's tissues; however, it's important to keep as active as you can in order to avoid weakening of the muscles (deconditioning).

Fibromyalgia and work

Many people with Fibromyalgia continue to work full or part time. With the persistent pain and fatigue associated with Fibromyalgia often makes working challenging so it's important to learn about managing Fibromyalgia symptoms and coping with pain and fatigue.

People with Fibromyalgia suffering persistent pain and fatigue (which doesn't resolve after 3 months) often make adaptations so they can keep working. Some choose to change the type of work they do, reduce their hours, or become self-employed. A change in duties or flexible working arrangements which allow people to work in comfortable settings and pace activities is helpful.

Top tips to help manage your Fibromyalgia in the workplace

- **Travelling to work.** Plan the best way for you to get to work, how to travel, the distance and the best time to travel. This may avoid spending time in rush hour traffic that can make your journey unnecessary longer. If you are a car driver you may be eligible for a Blue Badge, if not discuss with employer parking availability close to your place of work.
- **Take regular breaks.** You may need to avoid sitting for too long and or standing for too long to manage your fatigue. Getting up moving around or changing your posture can help. Discuss with your line manager about building in regular breaks into your day.
- **Be realistic about what you can do.** Avoid activities which could cause discomfort and pain that lasts more than a couple of hours. Don't try to overdo activities, let your line manager know as they may not be aware how you are feeling or the impact of your condition.
- **Practice techniques to manage your fatigue and pain.** There are many techniques for managing pain and fatigue that can be helpful when incorporated into your daily routine. Think about how these will work for you when planning your week i.e. gentle stretching before work and relaxation after work.
- **Pace and plan activities.** Pacing and planning your activities at work will allow you to schedule enough time to complete each task without feeling under pressure. Plan in regular breaks to change your position and posture.
- **Supportive Equipment.** Sometimes use of ergonomic equipment such as mouse and a keyboard or a postural chair to support or a standing desk can be helpful. Providing memory aids, such as schedulers or organisers can be useful. Access to Work may be able to offer you and your employer support in assessing what equipment may be beneficial.

- **Plan your annual leave.** Plan your time off in advance thought out the year. A proper break will give you time to relax, connect with family and friends and take part in activities that you enjoy. This will help you to feel rested on your return to work.
- **Take advantage of employer's resources and benefits.** Your workplace may offer free initiative to support with your health and wellbeing. This may include Employee Assistance Program (EA) which can offer free confidential counselling or other support. Find out what is available to you through your manager or company website.
- **Environment.** If you experience a negative impact from noise explore how you can reduce this in your workplace.

How do I know I have Fibromyalgia? What are the symptoms of Fibromyalgia?

When people first discover they have Fibromyalgia (and this is normally long before it is diagnosed by their GP) they experience a variety of symptoms such as pain, headaches and fatigue and distributed sleep patterns. When this is the case it is important to consult your GP as soon as possible.

The symptoms of Fibromyalgia can include:

- Widespread pain, often made worse by sustained activity
- Tiredness (fatigue) or lack of energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Irritability, feeling low or weepy
- Irritable or uncomfortable bowel
- Forgetfulness or poor concentration known as "fibro fog"
- Increased sensitivity (to cold, sound, knocks and bumps)
- Tender joints and muscles
- Increased stress, worry or low mood

What causes Fibromyalgia?

The exact cause of Fibromyalgia is unknown and no specific physical cause has been found. The pain people with Fibromyalgia feel is different because it's not directly caused by damage or injury to the area that's hurting. Instead there's a problem with the way the brain and nervous system process pain from that area.

Low levels of certain hormones may be a key factor in Fibromyalgia along with and sleep disturbances and possible genetic influence.

People with Fibromyalgia quite often report that their symptoms started after an illness or accident, or following a period of emotional stress and anxiety. However, others can't recall any particular event leading up to the onset of symptoms.

Talking to your GP or another health care provider about your Fibromyalgia

People often report that they have experienced pain in different areas of the body for a period of time and feeling fatigued before being diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. Remembering and describe your symptoms can be difficult so write down when they occurred and how long they lasted. Having words that describe your pain and giving it a score from 0 to 10 (10 being the worse pain felt) will help the GP. A sleep diary would also be useful information to give to your GP including hours slept and how you felt the following day. Make a note of any other symptoms you have experienced at the same time of your pain and fatigue.

Fibromyalgia is often difficult to diagnose as the symptoms vary considerably and could have other causes. The symptoms can be similar to those of other conditions. The following features are to be present when making a diagnosis:

- widespread pain lasting three months or more
- fatigue and/or waking up feeling unrefreshed
- problems with thought processes like memory and understanding.

Treatment for Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a long-term (chronic) condition, and recovery varies from person to person. There's no known cure at present. Fibromyalgia has numerous symptoms, meaning that no single treatment will work for all of them. Treatment tries to ease some of your symptoms and improve quality of life by a combination of:

- **Medication** – antidepressants and painkillers
- **Physiotherapy** – to support with exercise and reducing pain
- **Talking therapies** – cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling
- **Self-management of symptoms**

But for some people the symptoms of pain and fatigue might last for several weeks or even months and years. Your GP will assess your suitability to be referred to a Pain Clinic or a Chronic Fatigue clinic to gain support with managing your pain.

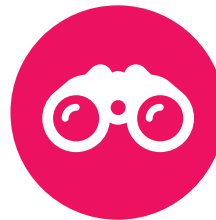
Some techniques to manage your Fibromyalgia

Building and creating a self-management plan using different skills and tools can be helpful in successfully manage your Fibromyalgia.



Be active: Exercise

Exercise reduces the effect of weak muscles and stiff joints which you may experience if you have been less active due to your pain. Exercise might make your back feel a bit sore at first but it doesn't cause any harm – so don't let it put you off! Exercise also releases endorphins which boost your mood and help to reduce pain.



Take notice

Be mindful. Mindfulness is a practice on focusing on what is happening “now” in the present moment. When you're mindful, you are aware of your thoughts without labelling them being good or bad. Mindfulness helps us ask “Is this constant replaying the thoughts over and over in my head helpful or simply making me feel bad”. Relaxation skills could be helpful for reducing muscular tension and to unwind the mind. Relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques or doing something like reading a book, listening to music are helpful for many people.



Keep learning: New hobbies

Having pain and fatigue can cause you to giving up certain hobbies or activities. By learning new things we meet new people and develop new skills which boost self-confidence and make us feel better. Some ideas can be learning a new word a week, a new language, arts and craft or joining a club to do these activities.



Connect; Reduce social isolation

Phone a friend or family member and talk to them instead of sending a text and arrange to speak regularly. Relationships are so important for promoting wellbeing and making you feel good.



Give back

Doing something nice for someone will back you feel better about yourself. Try committing an act of kindness once a week; give someone a compliment or ask how someone how they are feel.



Pacing, Prioritising & Planning

Doing too much on your 'good' days, and less on your "bad days" is not an ideal for Fibromyalgia. Prioritise doing the things that really matter so you can plan and pace yourself.



Posture

Staying still in awkward positions while working or driving, for example will affect the soft tissues in your back's support structures and may increase your symptoms. Beware of your posture keep changing your posture regularly.



Sleep

It may be difficulty to get to sleep when you have pain and already feel exhausted. Sleep is so important for your health and wellbeing. Some tips are removing any phone or screens the blue light is bad for your sleep. Have an aired room and create a relaxed atmosphere to sleep in.



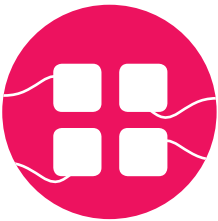
Don't let your negative thoughts get the better of you

Pain can cause you to have a negative impact on your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Trying to learn to recognise when this is happening to your thought so that you can begin to challenge them and change them.



Watch your weight

Being overweight increases the strain on your joints. No particular diet has been proven to help Fibromyalgia, but we recommend keeping your weight within a healthy range by eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables and keeping hydrated.



TENS

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (or TENS for short) aims to block pain messages to the brain and encourage the body to release the hormone endorphins. TENS machines are available on line or in pharmacies.

Useful links

Helplines

Fibromyalgia
Action UK
0300 999 3333
10am-4pm
Monday-Friday

Action on
pain!
0345 6031593
www.action-on-pain.co.uk



ARTHRITIS CARE
0808 800 4050

Arthritis
Research
0800 5200520



Pain
CONCERN
0300 123 0789
10am to 4pm every
Mon/Thurs/Friday