



# Patient Information Sheet: Fibromyalgia

## What is fibromyalgia?

- Fibromyalgia is generalized pain in the area of the muscles, ligaments and tendons.

## How common is fibromyalgia?

- Women are much more likely than men to develop fibromyalgia.
- Three in 100 people are affected.

## What causes fibromyalgia?

- For many people fibromyalgia develops without any known cause.
- Possible triggers are accidents, work injuries, viral illnesses, surgery, infections, emotional trauma and stress. Many theories are suggested but none are yet proven.
- Fibromyalgia can result in depression, an increase in pain and disturbed sleep.

## How do you know if you have fibromyalgia?

- Symptoms may include feeling tired, stiffness (especially in the morning), widespread muscle and joint pain, numbness, interrupted sleep, poor memory and concentration.
- Some people may also suffer from depression, have tension and migraine headaches, an irritable bowel and bladder, chronic fatigue syndrome and pain in their jaw (temporomandibular joint dysfunction).
- Having pain throughout your body for more than three months and tenderness in 11 of 18 specific tender point sites may mean you have fibromyalgia.
- Tender points are positive when your doctor using his/her thumb applies pressure to them and there is pain. This can also be done with a dolorimeter, which applies pressure in a uniform way over the tender point.
- You may also have a wide variety of other symptoms. Blood tests, x-rays and other tests may be used to exclude or rule out another diagnosis. That is to say, these tests do not diagnose the disease.

## How is fibromyalgia treated?

- You can take steps to help manage your pain.
- Even if you follow your doctor's recommendations, you may still have some pain. Medicine, exercise and lifestyle changes are helpful but they do not cure fibromyalgia.

*Medication*

- The most effective medications are tricyclics and tetracyclics, which are also used for treating depression. They may increase the amount of time you spend in deep sleep as well as relieve pain.

**For medications prescribed by your doctor, it is important to know:**

Name(s) (generic and brand): \_\_\_\_\_

How much to take: \_\_\_\_\_

When to take it: \_\_\_\_\_

How quickly will it work: \_\_\_\_\_

For how long should it be taken: \_\_\_\_\_

Side effects to look out for: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Exercise*

- It is very important to start exercising gradually.
- Exercises to consider include walking, low impact aerobics, water exercise programs (aquasize), and use of exercise equipment like bikes or treadmills.
- Before beginning any exercise it is very important to warm up with stretching exercises.
- When you start exercising for the first time it is not unusual to feel some soreness.
- The best time to exercise is when you feel energetic.

*Lifestyle Management*

- An occupational therapist or your physician can help you develop strategies so that you will not feel so tired or stressed.

*Protect Your Joints*

- Pace yourself by alternating heavy or repeated tasks with easy ones or rest.

*Relaxation*

- Relaxing the muscles reduces joint pain.
- Relaxation can include deep breathing exercises, listening to music, visualization, prayer, meditation or listening to relaxation tapes.

**For More Information...**

This fact sheet is just a brief look at fibromyalgia. For more information or if you have any questions, ask your doctor or pharmacist, or call The Arthritis Society at 1-800-321-1433. You can also visit The Arthritis Society's Web site at [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)

**Questions to ask your doctor at your next visit**

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