

Do I Have Fibromyalgia?

What You Need to Know

What Is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, and heightened sensitivity to pressure or touch throughout the body. It is not a joint disease or an inflammatory condition — instead, it involves changes in the way the brain and nervous system process pain signals. People with fibromyalgia experience pain more intensely than others because the central nervous system becomes "sensitized," amplifying ordinary sensations into painful ones.

Fibromyalgia affects an estimated 4 million adults in the United States and is more common in women than men. It often develops following a physical trauma, surgery, infection, or significant psychological stress, and it frequently occurs alongside conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, anxiety, and depression.

What Does It Feel Like?

The hallmark of fibromyalgia is widespread pain — typically described as a constant dull ache that has been present for at least three months and affects both sides of the body, above and below the waist. Common experiences include:

- Widespread muscle aching, stiffness, and tenderness
- Fatigue and exhaustion, even after a full night of sleep
- Cognitive difficulties often called "fibro fog" — trouble concentrating, remembering, or thinking clearly
- Sleep disturbances — difficulty falling or staying asleep, or waking unrefreshed
- Headaches or migraines
- Tingling or numbness in the hands and feet
- Sensitivity to light, noise, temperature, or touch
- Irritable bowel syndrome or digestive discomfort
- Pain that seems to move around the body from day to day

What Makes It Worse?

Fibromyalgia symptoms tend to flare in response to:

- Stress — physical or emotional
- Poor or disrupted sleep
- Changes in weather or temperature
- Overexertion or doing too much on a "good" day
- Illness or infection
- Hormonal fluctuations

How Did This Happen?

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is not fully understood, but researchers believe it involves a combination of genetic, neurological, and environmental factors. The nervous system appears to become hypersensitive — a process called central sensitization — meaning pain signals are amplified and processed abnormally.

Common triggers or contributing factors include:

- A physically or emotionally traumatic event (injury, illness, surgery, or loss)
- Repetitive injuries or cumulative physical stress
- A family history of fibromyalgia
- Other rheumatic conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus
- Post-viral syndromes or chronic infections

When Should I Be Concerned?

Fibromyalgia does not cause joint damage or organ damage. However, you should seek evaluation if you experience:

- New or worsening joint swelling or redness
- Unexplained weight loss, fever, or night sweats
- Significant changes in bowel or bladder function
- Symptoms that are severely affecting your daily functioning or mental health

The Good News

Fibromyalgia is manageable with the right treatment approach. Physical therapy plays a central role — a structured, gradual exercise program is one of the most effective treatments available and can significantly reduce pain and fatigue over time. Manual therapy, education, relaxation techniques, and pacing strategies all help patients regain function and quality of life.

Fibromyalgia is **manageable** with the right treatment approach, and most patients see meaningful improvement with consistent physical therapy.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

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