

# Symptoms

The primary symptoms of fibromyalgia include widespread musculoskeletal pain, severe fatigue, and disturbed sleep. Fibromyalgia means pain in the muscles, ligaments, and tendons – the soft fibrous tissues in the body.

Most patients with fibromyalgia say that they ache all over. Their muscles may feel like they were pulled or overworked. Sometimes fibromyalgia symptoms include muscle twitches and burning sensations. More women than men are afflicted with fibromyalgia, and it shows up in people of all ages. A conservative estimate of its prevalence is 2% of the general population, but it may be as high as 3-5%.

To help your family and friends relate to your fibromyalgia symptoms, have them think back to the last time they had a bad flu. Every muscle in their body shouted out in pain. In addition, they felt devoid of energy as though someone had unplugged their power supply. While the severity of symptoms fluctuates from person to person, fibromyalgia may resemble a post-viral state. This similarity is the reason experts believe that fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) may actually be the same condition. Gulf War syndrome also overlaps with FMS/CFS.

## Common symptoms of fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome:

- **Pain** - The pain of fibromyalgia has no boundaries. People describe the pain as deep muscular aching, throbbing, shooting, and stabbing. Intense burning may also be present. Quite often, the pain and stiffness are worse in the morning and you may hurt more in muscle groups that are used repetitively.
- **Fatigue** - This symptom can be mild in some fibromyalgia patients and yet incapacitating in others. The fatigue has been described as "brain fatigue" in which patients feel totally drained of energy. Many patients depict this situation by saying that they feel as though their arms and legs are tied to concrete blocks, and they have difficulty concentrating, e.g., brain fog.
- **Sleep disorder** - Most fibromyalgia patients have an associated sleep disorder called the alpha-EEG anomaly. This condition was uncovered in a sleep lab with the aid of a machine that recorded the brain waves of patients during sleep. Researchers found that the majority of fibromyalgia patients could fall asleep without much trouble, but their deep level (or stage 4) sleep was constantly interrupted by bursts of awake-like brain activity. Patients appeared to spend the night with one foot in sleep and the other one out of it.

Sleep lab tests may not be necessary to determine if you have disturbed sleep. If you wake up feeling as though you've just been run over by a Mack truck—what doctors refer to as unrefreshing sleep—it is reasonable for your physician to assume that you have a sleep disorder. Many fibromyalgia patients have been found to have other sleep disorders in addition to the alpha-EEG, such as sleep apnea (as well as the newly discovered form of interrupted breathing called upper airway resistance syndrome, or UARS), bruxism (teeth grinding), periodic limb movement during sleep (jerking of arms and legs), and restless legs syndrome (difficulty sitting still in the evenings).

- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome** - Constipation, diarrhea, frequent abdominal pain, abdominal gas, and nausea represent symptoms frequently found in roughly 40 to 70% of fibromyalgia patients. Acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) also occurs with the same high frequency.

- **Chronic headaches** - Recurrent migraine or tension-type headaches are seen in about 70% of fibromyalgia patients and can pose a major problem in coping for this patient group.
- **Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction Syndrome** - This syndrome, sometimes referred to as TMJ or TMD, causes tremendous jaw-related face and head pain in one-quarter of fibromyalgia patients. However, a 1997 published report indicated that close to 75% of fibromyalgia patients have a varying degree of jaw discomfort. Typically, the problems are related to the muscles and ligaments surrounding the jaw joint and not necessarily the joint itself.
- **Other common symptoms** - Premenstrual syndrome and painful periods, chest pain, morning stiffness, cognitive or memory impairment, numbness and tingling sensations, muscle twitching, irritable bladder, the feeling of swollen extremities, skin sensitivities, dry eyes and mouth, dizziness, and impaired coordination can occur. Fibromyalgia patients are often sensitive to odors, loud noises, bright lights, and sometimes even the medications they are prescribed.
- **Aggravating factors** - Changes in weather, cold or drafty environments, infections, allergies, hormonal fluctuations (premenstrual and menopausal states), stress, depression, anxiety and over-exertion may all contribute to fibromyalgia symptom flare-ups.