

# Fibromyalgia



## ARTHRITIS INFORMATION SHEET

This sheet has been written for people affected by fibromyalgia. It provides general information to help you understand how fibromyalgia affects you and what you can do to manage it. It also tells you where to find further information and advice.

### What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a condition where the main symptom is long lasting (chronic) pain that affects the whole body. It is not rare and affects around two out of every 100 people. Anyone can develop Fibromyalgia however it is twice as common in women.

Fibromyalgia is poorly understood and sometimes frustrating condition. Fortunately doctors are getting better at recognising fibromyalgia and as a result those affected are getting help sooner.

Fibromyalgia does not cause inflammation or damage to painful areas, but may be due to a overactive or hypersensitive pain system.

Fibromyalgia is different to polymyalgia rheumatica, a type of arthritis in which symptoms are felt more in the muscles.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of fibromyalgia are:

- chronic pain – usually aching, stiffness and tiredness of muscles. Pain may be worst after rest (eg. first thing in the morning) or after activity
- extreme fatigue (tiredness), making it difficult to do your normal daily activities
- poor sleep
- problems with concentration and memory (“fibro fog”)

Some people may also experience:

- Having other body symptoms such as headaches, irritable bowel (tummy pain or bloating)
- be hypersensitive to certain sounds, light or temperature
- sometimes feel frustrated, worried or down

### What causes it?

It is not known what causes fibromyalgia. It can be more common in people who have:

- inflammatory arthritis (for example, rheumatoid arthritis)
- an illness, such as a virus (or following an illness or infection)
- experienced emotional stress and depression.

For many people fibromyalgia starts without any obvious cause. Research suggests that the body may become extra sensitive in the way it signals and processes pain in people with fibromyalgia.

### How is it diagnosed?

Fibromyalgia can be difficult to diagnose. The body’s tissues appear normal when examined by a doctor.

There are no blood tests, x-rays or scans that can test for fibromyalgia. Your doctor or rheumatologist (arthritis specialist) will look for a number of features that are typical of fibromyalgia to diagnose the condition.

Questionnaires on the internet or in magazines that you can fill out at home only screen for fibromyalgia. You will still need to have a diagnosis of fibromyalgia confirmed by an experienced doctor.

Once your fibromyalgia has been fully assessed, your GP or specialist may prepare a care plan with you to manage the services and treatments you require.


### What will happen to me?

The good news is that the muscles and joints of people with fibromyalgia are not being damaged. It is important to remember that, with help and better understanding, the symptoms can be effectively managed. The symptoms of fibromyalgia may range from very mild to severe.

They may last for many years or they may come and go at different times. With the right advice most people find they learn to manage the pain and tiredness over time.

Health professional input may be required at times if the pain is more severe and affecting your normal activities.

For your local Arthritis Office:

 1800 011 041

 [arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://arthritisaustralia.com.au)

 Arthritis  
AUSTRALIA

 Australian  
Rheumatology  
Association

## Can fibromyalgia be cured?

Currently there is no cure for fibromyalgia. While there are ways you can control your symptoms, you should be wary of any products or treatments that claim to cure fibromyalgia.

## What can I do?

Learn about fibromyalgia and play an active role in your treatment. Not all information you read or hear about is trustworthy so always talk to your doctor or healthcare team about treatments you are thinking about trying. Reliable sources of further information are also listed in the section below. Self management courses aim to help you develop skills to be actively involved in your healthcare. Contact your local Arthritis Office for details of these courses.

**Find ways to manage pain.** It can be useful to change the way you think about, and react to, pain. A psychologist can teach you skills to help you manage your pain.

Acupuncture, particularly with electrical stimulation, may also help reduce pain and improve overall wellbeing, sleep and fatigue. See the *Dealing with pain* information sheet.

**Stay active.** Exercise has been proven by research to help with pain and other symptoms. Always start gently and slowly, and build up as you become fitter and stronger. See the *Exercise and fibromyalgia* sheet for more information.

**Balance activity and rest.** Learn to listen to your body and be guided by it. Try to space out your week's

activities to give yourself time to rest. If you are having a bad day, be ready to change your plans and not force yourself to work through pain. See an occupational therapist to learn ways to cope with fatigue and make daily tasks easier. See the *Working with your healthcare team* sheet for more information about seeing an occupational therapist and the *Fatigue and arthritis* information sheet.

**Keep to a healthy weight.** There is no proof that a special diet can help fibromyalgia. Losing any extra weight and having a healthy diet will help you feel in control of your body. See the *Healthy eating* information sheet.

**Talk to your doctor about medicines.** Typical arthritis medicines, such as pain relievers and anti-inflammatory drugs, are not usually helpful in fibromyalgia. However some people with fibromyalgia may find that their pain or other symptoms can be controlled with medicines that are sometimes used to treat epilepsy or depression.

Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any medicines as even natural and over-the-counter medicines can have side effects.

Acknowledge your feelings and seek support. As there is no cure for fibromyalgia and it can affect many parts of your life, it is natural to feel scared, frustrated, sad and sometimes angry. Be aware of these feelings and get help if they start affecting your daily life. See the *Arthritis and emotions* information sheet.

**CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ARTHRITIS OFFICE FOR MORE INFORMATION SHEETS ON ARTHRITIS.**

Learn about fibromyalgia and your treatment options. There are many things you can do to live well with fibromyalgia.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Websites:

Arthritis Australia [www.ArthritisAustralia.com.au](http://www.ArthritisAustralia.com.au)

American College of Rheumatology  
[www.rheumatology.org](http://www.rheumatology.org)

Arthritis Foundation (US) [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

To find a physiotherapist, ask your doctor, contact the Australian Physiotherapy Association on 1300 306 622 or use the 'find a physio' feature at [www.physiotherapy.asn.au](http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au)

To find an occupational therapist, ask your doctor, contact Occupational Therapy Australia on 1300 682 878 or use the 'find an OT' feature at [www.otaus.com.au](http://www.otaus.com.au)

To find a psychologist, ask your doctor or contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 or [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

### Booklets:

Arthritis Australia's *Taking control of your Fibromyalgia* booklet provides information and practical tips for managing Fibromyalgia. To get a copy, visit: [www.arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au) or by calling 1800 011 041

© Copyright Arthritis Australia 2007. Reviewed August 2024. **Source:** A full list of the references used to compile this sheet is available from your local Arthritis Office The Australian General Practice Network, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Practice Nurses Association, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners contributed to the development of this information sheet. The Australian Government has provided funding to support this project.

Your local Arthritis Office has information, education and support for people with arthritis

**Infoline 1800 011 041 or [arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://arthritisaustralia.com.au)**