

Quick Facts on Fibromyalgia

Definition

- Fibromyalgia is a condition characterized by **chronic, widespread pain** as well as a variety of other symptoms, such as tenderness, fatigue and difficulty sleeping. These symptoms tend to vary in intensity over time.
- Fibromyalgia can make it **difficult to perform everyday activities**, such as climbing stairs, light household tasks and walking short distances.

Prevalence

- Fibromyalgia affects an estimated 2 to 4 percent of the US population, or as many as **6 to 12 million** people.
- Although fibromyalgia affects both men and women, approximately **90 percent** of fibromyalgia sufferers are **female**. It is estimated that there could be as many American women living **with fibromyalgia** as there are living with diabetes.

Cause

- The underlying cause of fibromyalgia is **unknown**; however research is ongoing in the field.
- Central nervous system defects are thought to play an important role in the pathophysiology of fibromyalgia. Alterations in both the **ascending and descending pain pathways** in the central nervous system may contribute to fibromyalgia pain.

Diagnosis

- There is **no objective laboratory test** or marker for diagnosis. However, diagnostic criteria for fibromyalgia were developed in 1990 by the American College of Rheumatology (ACR). These criteria are 1) a history of widespread pain lasting more than three months and 2) the presence of pain in 11 of 18 tender point sites on certain areas in all four quadrants of the body.
- Today, the diagnosis is based on patient history, physical examination, laboratory evaluations, and exclusion of other diseases.
- Unfortunately, patients are often referred to numerous physicians, including a variety of specialists before receiving an accurate diagnosis.
- **Nearly 70 percent** of people with fibromyalgia **have not been diagnosed**.
- It is estimated that it takes an **average of 5 years** for a fibromyalgia patient to receive an **accurate diagnosis**.

Management

- There are **FDA-approved medications** that can help manage the symptoms of fibromyalgia, as well as lifestyle changes that may be appropriate.
- Although no specific diet has been shown to relieve symptoms, a **healthy and balanced diet** can increase energy levels and alertness, and help prevent other health problems.
- People with fibromyalgia may also benefit from **moderate exercise**, such as low-impact aerobics or daily stretching.