

## FIBROMYALGIA a Summary

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) is a chronic, complex condition characterized by widespread body pain in muscles, tendons, ligaments and other soft tissues. The pain can be described as aching or burning, being unpredictable in severity and location from day to day. Some people with FMS experience only moderate discomfort but for others, the symptoms can be severe and disabling, interfering with their ability to do daily tasks or to maintain employment.

### How Common is FMS?

The fibromyalgia syndrome is a common illness. In fact, it is as common as rheumatoid arthritis and can be even more painful. Fibromyalgia used to be referred to as fibrositis, although the term fibromyalgia is now preferred. The name is composed of “fibro“, for fibrous tissues such as tendons and ligaments; “my“ indicating muscle; and “algia”, meaning pain. FMS affects from 2 – 10% of the population, that is 600,000 to 3 million Canadians. More women than men develop FMS in a ratio of 8:1. The syndrome can affect all age groups, including children, and all racial/ethnic groups.

### A Collection of Symptoms

In addition to pain, the following symptoms may accompany FMS. Since these could be signs of other illnesses and not “just part of FMS”, they should always be discussed with a doctor.

- *Fatigue* - ranges from feeling tired to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness. It may come and go leaving people suddenly drained of all energy – as if someone just “pulled the plug”.
- *Non-restorative sleep* - waking up still tired. Also, problems with insomnia, frequent awakenings or restless legs.
- *Stiffness* - most severe in the morning and after periods of inactivity.
- *Headaches* - ranging from tension headaches to migraines. May be caused by tight or overused neck and shoulder muscles that refer pain to the head resulting in myofascial pain syndrome with painful “trigger points” in muscles.
- *Irritable bowel* - frequent diarrhea or constipation, sometimes accompanied by gas in the abdomen or nausea.
- *Dizziness or vertigo* - difficulty with balance usually in standing or problems with visual tracking and focusing. Temporomandibular (jaw) joint (TMJ) dysfunction may also play a part.

- *Pelvic pain* - an increase in urinary urgency or frequency, often without infection (irritable bladder) or interstitial cystitis, a chronic inflammation of the bladder wall. May also include pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), vulvar vestibulitis or vulvodynia.
- *Numbness or tingling* - a prickling or burning sensation often in the hands or feet (paraesthesia).
- *Chest wall pain* - severe muscular pain where the ribs meet the breast bone, associated with shallow breathing (also known as costochondralgia or costochondritis).
- *Cognitive problems* - difficulty with concentration, short-term memory, easy distractibility, and word mix-ups when speaking or writing (“fibro-fog”).
- *Sensory sensitivity* – hypersensitivity to light, noise, touch, odours, temperature, chemicals, medications and even foods. Also, symptoms such as rhinitis, itching, and rashes may occur.

### Diagnosis

FMS is not new, but can be difficult to diagnose. At present, the condition cannot be identified in standard laboratory tests or X-rays. Many of its signs and symptoms are found in other conditions as well – especially chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

When someone goes to the doctor reporting pain all over and exhaustion that does not go away even after a night's sleep, fibromyalgia must be considered. Pain and fatigue are the two main symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia is diagnosed in two steps. First, other illnesses and conditions are ruled out by a thorough examination, including:

- (a) a review of the person's medical history, to ensure that no previous condition is in some way responsible for the symptoms;
- (b) laboratory tests, including analysis of the person's blood and urine, to assess whether a hidden infection or disease could be causing the problem. Sometimes X-rays or neurological tests are done, depending on when and how the symptoms began.

The second step is to apply the following official criteria originally published in 1990 by an international committee:

- (a) widespread pain for more than three months,  
- together with -
- (b) pain in at least 11 of 18 specified tender point sites

Supplemental criteria were proposed in the 2012 Canadian Guidelines for the diagnosis and management of Fibromyalgia Syndrome. These recommendations focus on a Widespread Pain Index and Symptom Severity scores to aid in the diagnosis of FMS instead of the tender point examination.

### What Causes FMS?

Fibromyalgia syndrome often develops after a triggering event which may be trauma (fall or car accident), infections, hormonal imbalances, surgery, or chemical exposure. Sometimes the condition begins without any obvious trigger. It often runs in families, suggesting a genetic predisposition.

The actual cause of FMS has not yet been found. Recent research has indicated dysfunction of the central nervous system leading to hypersensitive pain processing. Studies have found a high level of substance P, a pain transmitter, in the spinal fluid of people with FMS, as well as low levels of serotonin, a chemical that moderates pain.

It has long been known that most people with FMS are deprived of deep, restorative sleep. This sleep disorder consists of constant interruptions of the deep, slow-wave sleep needed for rest and restoration of tissue and contributes to the profound fatigue that is usual in fibromyalgia.

Ongoing research has also demonstrated findings such as irregular blood flow in parts of the brain, impaired cortisol and growth hormone production, a particular type of low blood pressure, changes in the function of the immune and autonomic nervous systems plus abnormal levels of some key chemical messengers in the body called neurotransmitters.

### Current Treatment

At the present time, treatment for fibromyalgia aims at managing the symptoms as much as possible, specifically reducing pain and improving sleep. The most widely used approaches include medications, physiotherapy, gentle low impact exercise plus pacing of rest and activity. Alternative treatments may be helpful such as acupuncture, EEG neurotherapy, relaxation therapy, tai chi, and cognitive behavioural therapy, among others.

Support from family, friends and the medical community is extremely important. The Fibromyalgia Support Group of Winnipeg plays a role in sharing information with those who struggle with this difficult condition. Monthly meetings, newsletters, a library and a Fibromyalgia education course are some of the resources available.

### Education Program

The Fibromyalgia Support Group of Winnipeg has organized the "Taking Charge of Fibromyalgia" program. It is designed to educate people with the most up-to-date information on fibromyalgia, enabling them to become the primary movers in the management of their condition. The course consists of a six-hour PowerPoint presentation and discussion series offered in the Spring and Fall. Contact the Group for more information including dates and times.

## Mission Statement

- To sponsor and promote educational programs and services to all persons with Fibromyalgia, their families and friends, their physicians and health-care professionals and to the general public.
- To promote and sponsor scientific and clinical research as to the causes, treatments, and cure of Fibromyalgia.

## Membership/Donation Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to receive your newsletter electronically, please add email address

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*\*\*Please make cheques payable to\*\**

**Fibromyalgia Support Group of Winnipeg Inc.**

Mail to: 825 Sherbrook Street

Winnipeg, MB R3A 1M5

Membership: New  Renewal

**Regular Membership**  
(includes family) \$20.00/year

**Professional Membership** \$30.00/year

Charitable Donation: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in volunteering

## The Benefits of Membership

Up-to-date medical information and Education Course

Newsletters

Monthly meetings (nine yearly)

Lending library of books and videos

Small neighbourhood support group meetings

Information about Fibromyalgia  
Aqua Fit classes and other exercise programs

Information on national and international seminars

Opportunities to volunteer and learn as you share

*We invite you to come and join us at our monthly meetings which are held at 7:00 p.m. on the first Monday of the month except for January, July and August. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.. Family and friends are welcome!*

*A \$3.00 drop in fee for non-members is appreciated.*

*Please respect our fragrance free environment.*

*Compliments of:*

Fibromyalgia Support Group of Winnipeg, Inc.  
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# What is Fibromyalgia?



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