

Living Well With Fibromyalgia: Your Guide to Finding What Helps

Understanding Fibromyalgia: It's Real, and It's Complex

Fibromyalgia is a **chronic (ongoing) pain condition** that affects how the brain and body process pain signals. In fibromyalgia, the brain and spinal cord become more sensitive (a process called central sensitization). **This turns up the volume on pain signals and causes your body to respond more strongly to sensations that might not normally cause pain.** You might be more sensitive to light, noise, and smells.

Along with widespread pain, fibromyalgia often includes:

- Deep tiredness (fatigue)
- Trouble sleeping
- Problems with mood
- Trouble thinking or remembering ("brain fog")



You might have fibromyalgia only or have it with other conditions. With fibromyalgia it's common to also have:

- Other ongoing pain conditions (for example: irritable bowel syndrome, migraines, low back pain, pelvic pain)
- Mood disorders (for example: anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD))
- Autoimmune illnesses (for example: lupus, rheumatoid arthritis)

Managing Fibromyalgia: Improvement is Possible

While fibromyalgia is a chronic condition, there is reason for hope. **Many people are able to improve their symptoms, daily function, and quality of life with the right combination of treatments, self-management strategies, and support.** There are often many symptoms happening at the same time. It can be hard to know where to start. Learning about fibromyalgia and available treatments is an important first step.

As you and your healthcare team make treatment decisions:

- **Focus on what matters most to you.** That might be walking the dog, playing with your grandchildren, returning to work, or enjoying a favorite hobby. Use these activities as your guide to help you measure progress and choose treatments that support your goals
- **Seek treatment for other conditions you have along with fibromyalgia.** Treating these is an important part of managing fibromyalgia

Your Personalized Fibromyalgia Toolkit

Managing fibromyalgia often works best by combining different approaches. This includes medicines when appropriate and non-medicine strategies (lifestyle). **There is no single treatment that works for everyone.** Learning about fibromyalgia and developing self-management skills are important tools. Finding the right treatment approach involves a process of **"trial and learn."**

Non-Medicine Tools (Lifestyle)

- **Gentle movement:** Regular movement can help calm your nervous system and improve strength, flexibility, and endurance. Use a "start low, go slow" approach. Try walking, stretching, yoga, tai chi, or water-based exercise
- **Better sleep:** Keep a consistent sleep schedule and practice healthy sleep habits. If sleep problems persist, talk with your healthcare provider about other strategies and possible sleep disorders
- **Stress management and counseling:** Living with fibromyalgia can be physically and emotionally challenging. Counseling like cognitive behavioral therapy can help you build strong coping skills, manage stress, and improve your quality of life

Medicines to Consider and Avoid

Medicine may help reduce symptoms for some people. Talk with your doctor about the benefits and risks and which treatment may be recommended for you. Your doctor may also recommend medicines in addition to these that may help ease specific symptoms.

FDA-Approved Medicines	Medicines Generally Not Recommended for Fibromyalgia
• Sublingual cyclobenzaprine • Duloxetine • Milnacipran • Pregabalin	• Corticosteroids • Opioids • Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines like ibuprofen Note: While not recommended for treating fibromyalgia, these medicines may be used for treating other conditions.

FDA, US Food and Drug Administration.

Next Steps You Can Take Now

You don't have to manage fibromyalgia alone! Connect with trusted educational resources, support groups, and others who understand the condition. This can give you knowledge, encouragement, and hope along the way. Here are some resources to get you started:



- **Fibromyalgia Association** <https://www.managefibromyalgia.org/> and on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FibroAssociation>
- **National Sleep Foundation** <https://www.thensf.org/>
- **Pain Guide (University of Michigan)** <https://painguide.com/>

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

Consider bringing these questions to your next appointment. Add your own questions to the list:

- Which daily activities can we focus on improving first?
- What treatment options do you recommend for my most bothersome symptoms? (Be prepared to share your top 2-3 concerns, as it may not be possible to address everything in one visit)
- How will we know if a treatment is working? When should we consider making changes?
- What lifestyle strategies, in addition to medicine, might help me manage my fibromyalgia?
- Where can I find educational resources and local support for lifestyle management?
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