



Bones, Muscles & Joints

FIBROMYALGIA SYNDROME

WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Unlike arthritis, which primarily affects the joints, fibromyalgia also involves the surrounding areas - muscles, tendons, connective tissue, and ligaments - causing symptoms of generalized muscle pain and fatigue.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON SYMPTOMS?

The most common symptoms are fatigue, stiffness, generalized pain, and specific areas of tenderness called tender points. Pain is felt primarily in the muscles and is often described as “flu-like” aching. People with fibromyalgia typically have difficulty sleeping or awoken feeling as though they haven’t slept at all. This sleep pattern/disturbance may interfere with that stage of sleep needed to function normally during the day. Often people report feeling depressed or anxious, and may also complain of difficulty concentrating. Sometimes they experience numbness or tingling in their hands or feet. Headaches are common and many people with fibromyalgia also report symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (abdominal pain, bloating, alternating constipation and diarrhea).

WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

Although we do not yet know the cause of this syndrome, we do know now that it is not caused by inflammation in the muscles or joints, and that, while it is chronic, it is not life-threatening and does not cause joint deformities. We also know that it appears to be associated with a variety of stressors — physical, social and emotional. Research is currently focusing on certain chemicals produced in the brain that are involved in pain perception, sleep and mood.

HOW IS FIBROMYALGIA DIAGNOSED?

There is no single test which can diagnose fibromyalgia. However, labwork or x-rays may be ordered to rule out other conditions that might also cause the type of pain you are experiencing. Your rheumatologist will also do a thorough history and physical exam looking for signs of other conditions that might cause the symptoms you are experiencing.

HOW IS FIBROMYALGIA TREATED?

As with so many other medical conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma), fibromyalgia is a chronic condition with no known cure. We know that inactivity aggravates rather than alleviates symptoms and, therefore, physical therapy and instruction in a slowly graduated conditioning exercise program is important. Medication may be prescribed to relax muscles and promote improved sleep patterns. Individualized physical and occupational therapy may be prescribed in the form of heat or cold, ultrasound, TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation), myofascial release, and relaxation techniques. All of these help to reduce muscle tension and relieve pain while improving function. Above all, education is key - it is critical that you learn what triggers and what alleviates your symptoms, and what you can do to actively manage the disorder.

If we treat you, we help you for a day.
If we teach you, we help you for a lifetime.

OUR DEDICATED TEAM

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