

Basics of Fibromyalgia



Definition of Fibromyalgia:

Fibromyalgia is a long-term disorder characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and cognitive issues often referred to as fibro fog.

Prevalence of Fibromyalgia:

- Affects 2–4% of the global population.
- Women are diagnosed more often than men, making up about 80–90% of cases.
- Frequently overlaps with other chronic conditions.

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia:

- Widespread pain described as aching, burning, or throbbing.
- Fatigue and low energy.
- Fibro fog, including memory lapses and poor concentration.
- Sleep issues such as insomnia and non-restorative sleep.
- Sensitivity to light, sound, and temperature.
- Digestive problems resembling IBS.
- Headaches, jaw pain, numbness, and tingling.

Causes & Theories of Fibromyalgia:

- Central sensitization: the nervous system amplifies pain signals.
- Neurotransmitter imbalance: irregularities in serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine.
- Genetics: family history increases risk.
- Triggers: physical trauma, infections, stress, and hormonal shifts.

Diagnosis of Fibromyalgia:

- No single test is available; diagnosis is based on clinical evaluation.
- Widespread pain lasting three months or more is a key marker.
- Often misdiagnosed as arthritis, depression, or chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Diagnostic tools include pain index and symptom severity scale.

Treatment of Fibromyalgia:

- Medications include antidepressants such as duloxetine and milnacipran, anticonvulsants like pregabalin and gabapentin, and pain relievers.
- Non-drug therapies include cognitive behavioral therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy.
- Lifestyle changes include regular low-impact exercise such as yoga, swimming, or walking, stress reduction, and good sleep hygiene.
- Complementary approaches include acupuncture, massage, mindfulness, and dietary changes.

Impact of Fibromyalgia:

- Physical effects include chronic pain, fatigue, and reduced stamina.
- Mental health challenges include anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.
- Work life can be affected by reduced productivity, absenteeism, and workplace stigma.
- Relationships may be strained due to the invisible and misunderstood nature of the illness.

Comorbidities of Fibromyalgia:

- Chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Endometriosis is particularly prevalent in women.
- Migraines.
- Temporomandibular joint disorder.

Flares & Triggers of Fibromyalgia:

- Weather changes, especially cold or humid conditions.
- Emotional or physical stress.
- Poor sleep.
- Overexertion.
- Hormonal changes such as menstruation or menopause.

Lifestyle & Self-Management with Fibromyalgia:

- Exercise such as gentle stretching, tai chi, or swimming.
- Nutrition focused on anti-inflammatory foods while avoiding processed sugars and caffeine.
- Sleep hygiene including a consistent schedule and relaxation before bed.
- Pacing activities to balance exertion with rest.
- Participation in support groups to reduce isolation.

Awareness & Advocacy for Fibromyalgia:

- Fibromyalgia Awareness Day is observed on May 12.
- The condition is represented by the purple ribbon.
- Advocacy efforts focus on recognition as a legitimate neurological condition.
- Fibromyalgia still faces stigma as an invisible illness.

Research & Future of Fibromyalgia:

- Ongoing studies include brain imaging, neurotransmitter patterns, and genetic links.
- Exploring connections with autoimmune conditions.
- Focus is on developing better diagnostic tools and targeted treatments.
- Patient-led advocacy is gaining global momentum.