

Better understanding and living with **FIBROMYALGIA**



An information guide to help you better understand this disease, manage your condition, and improve your quality of life.

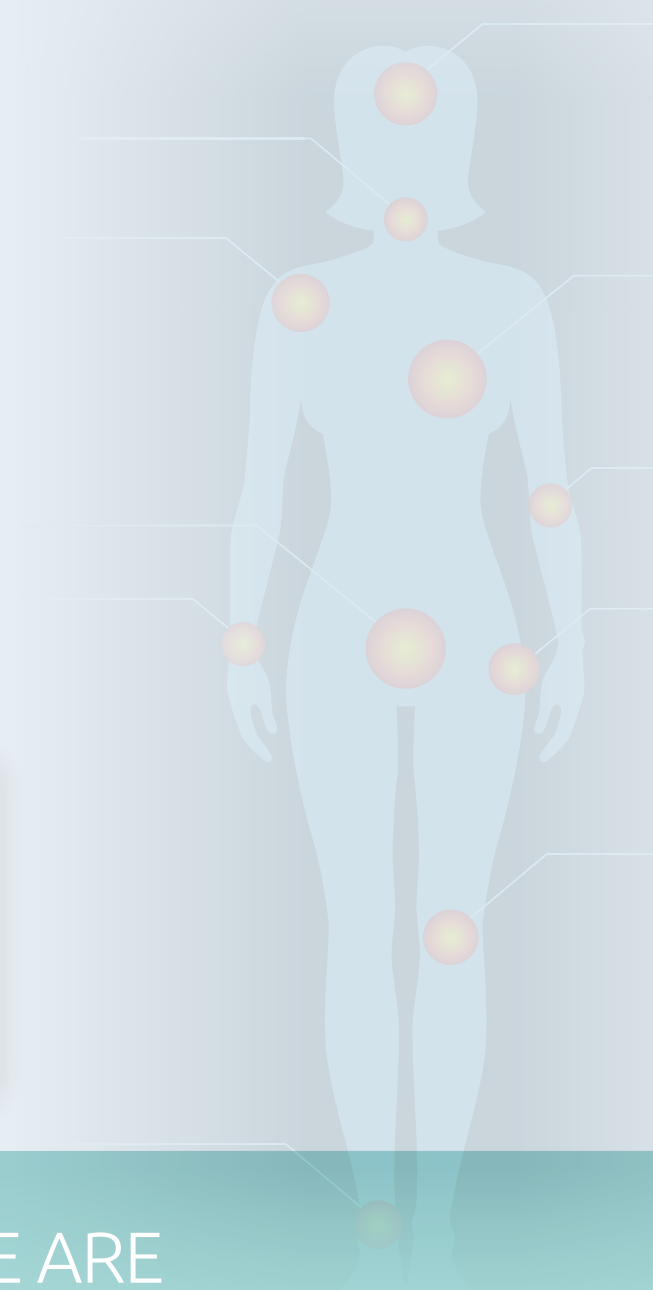
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WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Recognized in 1992 by the World Health Organization, fibromyalgia is a chronic disease that causes pain and extreme sensitivity in many parts of the body. Pain is usually muscular, but joint pain may also be present, such as stiffness. Some people have neuropathic pain such as burning, numbness, or tingling. This kind of pain is often accompanied by fatigue, difficulty sleeping, headaches, depressed mood, anxiety, and mild cognitive impairment known as "fibromyalgia fog," a brain fog such as impaired concentration, memory, or attention.

Fibromyalgia is not a degenerative disease. It does not cause physical damage, paralysis, or finger deformities. This means no permanent damage to muscles, bones, or joints. Symptoms remain more or less the same over time, although there may be some variations.



HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY FIBROMYALGIA?

According to Statistics Canada, 2% of the Canadian population aged 25 or over suffer from fibromyalgia, or almost 708,800 people.

Source : www.statcan.gc.ca

Three percent of Canadians aged 65 or over are affected. Women account for almost 5% and men for almost 1%.

Source : www.statcan.gc.ca

Fibromyalgia can affect all age groups: women, men, and children, regardless of ethnic origin or socioeconomic status.

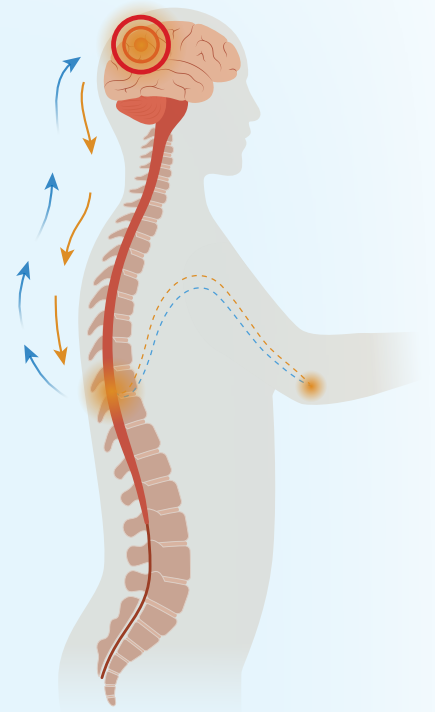
WHY DOES FIBROMYALGIA CAUSE MORE PAIN?

Several researchers have attempted to understand why people with fibromyalgia experience increased sensitivity to pain. Research is still ongoing to find out what causes the pain. So far, these are the most plausible explanations that have been identified.

Pain is controlled by the nervous system. This includes the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. Nerves transmit pain information to the brain. When the brain receives and processes this information, the person may feel pain.

The processing of pain information in a person without fibromyalgia triggers a number of reactions to reduce the pain and restore a state of equilibrium.

For example, someone who stubs their toe will feel pain, and then their system will quickly return to a state of equilibrium. The pain disappears.



Certain conditions can increase pain such as stress, fatigue, cold, too much or too little physical activity, etc.



The systems for controlling pain messages do not function properly in people with fibromyalgia. An imbalance means that the mechanisms that lead to the sensation of pain are increased, and those that inhibit pain are decreased. In other words, you feel more pain for longer for the same stimulation. Sometimes you may even feel pain without any painful stimulation.

Although pain is always present, its intensity can vary. Certain conditions can increase pain such as stress, fatigue, cold, too much or too little physical activity, etc. So you'll experience moments when the pain is greater and others when it's less.

HOW IS FIBROMYALGIA DIAGNOSED?

Fibromyalgia is currently diagnosed clinically. This means that it is based on the answers you give to the questions asked by your doctor and on a physical examination. Your doctor will ask you to have a blood test, including some simple tests, to rule out certain medical conditions that can cause fibromyalgia-like pain.

Alain Moreau, PhD, a professor at the University of Montréal and researcher at the CHU Sainte-Justine Research Centre, discovered disease biomarkers in 2023. Biomarkers are biological signals in the body that can provide important information about a person's health or the presence of a particular disease such as fibromyalgia. There is a variety of biomarkers.

In the test developed by Professor Moreau, the biomarkers used are tiny ribonucleic acid (RNA) molecules called microRNAs which, when detected in the blood, can indicate the presence of fibromyalgia or assess the efficacy of a treatment. Think of biomarkers as clues that help doctors and scientists understand what's going on inside the body. This brand-new molecular test has not yet been approved or marketed. Nevertheless, people with fibromyalgia symptoms can take advantage of this test for research purposes.

WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

The cause of fibromyalgia remains unknown to this day. Some individuals, however, may be genetically predisposed from birth. In some people, factors such as significant physical stress (e.g., an accident, injury, infection, virus,

hospitalization, childbirth) or psychological stress (e.g., marital separation, bereavement, or abuse appear to trigger or worsen symptoms.


HOW CAN YOU MANAGE YOUR SYMPTOMS?

Currently, there is no cure for fibromyalgia. Properly managed, however, the symptoms of fibromyalgia can diminish and, for some sufferers, even seem to disappear, even though the disease is still present in the body. It's important to take action on a number of fronts to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life.

1. Get active to feel better

Physical activity is the cornerstone of treatment. Several studies show that regular physical exercise is the best remedy for the fatigue and pain of fibromyalgia. When you exercise, your body generates chemicals that have many benefits. In addition to reducing the sensation of pain, it improves the length and

quality of your sleep is improved and reduces your stress and the risk of constipation. By exercising regularly, at your own pace and according to your own capacity, you'll be able to better control the symptoms of your condition.



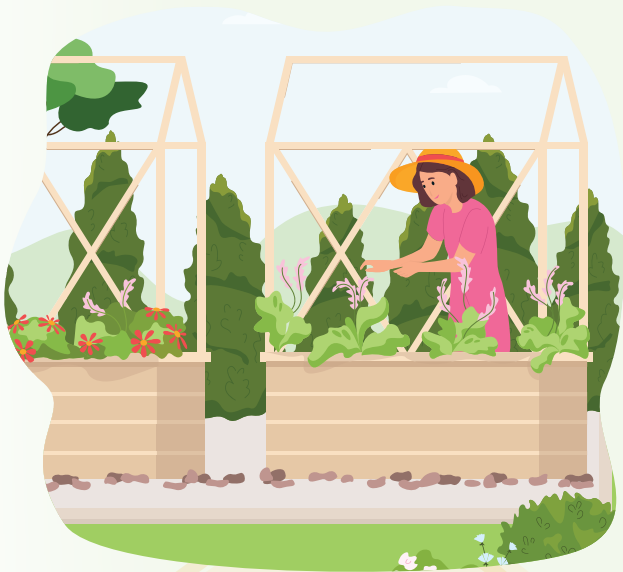
Physical activity won't damage your muscles—quite the opposite! Over time, it will help reduce your pain and make it easier to carry out your activities.

How do I get back to being physically active?

You may have noticed that too much physical activity increases your pain. But remember that if you don't do enough, the aches and pains will also increase, and you'll be less fit for your activities. It's important to find the perfect balance for you. You may ask yourself how do I get over the hump and start exercising again; Ideally, you should start very slowly, at your own pace. Your body will gradually get used to the physical effort and feel the beneficial effects. Choosing a physical activity you enjoy is the winning solution!

Specialists recommend a very slow increase in exercise duration of around 10% per week or every 2 weeks. For example, if you start with ten minutes of walking, three to four times a week, you can add a minute every week. Eventually, you'll want to aim for 30 minutes of exercise three times a week.

Ideally, you should identify the time of day when you have the most energy, and choose a physical activity that feels right for you and that you enjoy. Walking is recognized as an effective and safe option, as is aquafitness. Tai chi and yoga are also popular. Activities that get you moving and that you enjoy, such as gardening, can also be good for you, as long as you respect your limits.



For exercise ideas, see the useful resources at the end of this document.

2. Get a good night's sleep

People with fibromyalgia all experience periods of insomnia or so-called unrefreshing sleep at one time or another. If you feel tired, you'll find it hard to concentrate, your mood will be affected, and you may feel more pain.

That's why it's important to establish good sleep habits. Remember, too, that exercise helps you sleep better.



What are the best habits to adopt for better sleep?

- Get up and go to bed at the same time every day.
- Avoid daytime naps. If necessary, take time to relax or unwind.
- Have a bedtime routine.
- Avoid foods and drinks containing caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate, brown soft drinks, etc.) in the afternoon and evening.
- Avoid electronic screens (including television, tablets, smartphones, and computers) before going to sleep.
- Use pillows or cushions to improve your comfort.

If sleep doesn't come after implementing good sleep habits, you can turn to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and, if necessary, medication (see further later in the brochure. Talk to your doctor.

We also invite you to visit the Fondation Sommeil website.

www.fondationsommeil.com



3. Practise cognitive-behavioural therapy

Research has shown that acceptance of chronic pain is associated with less pain and less disability as well as the emotional distress caused by pain. So it's important to acquire the means to reach that stage.



If you suffer from fibromyalgia and are going through a difficult time, cognitive-behavioural therapy, offered by psychologists and doctors trained in this approach, can be an excellent way of managing your condition. This short-term therapy is effective in treating certain problems you may be experiencing, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, difficulty adapting to

your pain condition, or sleep disorders. This is a short (usually less than 10 sessions), scientifically validated therapy that aims to replace the thoughts that sustain difficult emotions (constantly focusing on pain) with more pleasant or realistic thoughts and reactions (thinking about other subjects, living in the present moment, etc.).

For your psychological health, make sure you relax, have positive relationships with others, and engage in activities that give you pleasure and make you feel proud and useful.

4. Modify your lifestyle habits

To better manage your fibromyalgia, you can take overall action to improve your health and change certain lifestyle habits:

- Opt for a healthy, balanced diet in which fruit, vegetables, and fiber play a key role. Reduce your intake of animal fats, sugar, alcohol, and stimulants such as coffee.
- Make sure you hydrate regularly.
- Practise stretching, relaxation, cardiac coherence, or mindfulness meditation techniques. For this to work, these techniques must be practiced regularly. Several websites and smartphone applications (such

as Petit BamBou and RespiRelax) can guide you through these techniques. Certain mind–body approaches—such as tai chi and yoga—also help to improve concentration and relaxation.

- Although their effectiveness has not always been scientifically proven, you can also turn to other approaches or methods to relieve pain, such as hypnosis, music therapy, Pilates, Qi-gong, and so on.
- If you smoke, we strongly advise you to stop, or at least reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke each day.

As a specialist in your condition, you are the only one who can judge the benefits of an approach for yourself.

Nevertheless, beware of promises of miraculous treatments and methods in which you depend entirely on the therapist. Choose methods that provide you with the tools and strategies you need to manage your condition independently.



5. Balance your activities

You've probably already had days where you have over done it with too many activities that have left you in pain for several days. To limit such occurrences, it is important to:

- Balance your activities throughout the day and week.
- Alternate the demands of your activities, for example, taking a walk and reading when you return.
- It's a good idea to plan breaks and time for the unexpected into your schedule.

- Modifying the way you carry out your activities—such as preparing portions of meals in a seated position, or asking those around you for help—can be a winning strategy.

Spread your activities throughout the day and the week, and plan breaks so you don't feel any increase in pain. You're the best judge of what feels good and gives you the most independence to manage your condition.

6. Get support

Living with fibromyalgia can sometimes be difficult, and it's important to seek support so you don't remain isolated. Fibromyalgia associations offer a variety of activities—such as self-help groups, workshops, and conferences—to help improve the quality of life of

fibromyalgia sufferers. To find the association nearest you, visit the Société québécoise de la fibromyalgie website, www.sqf.quebec, or call 1-833-933-6530.

7. Use medication, if necessary

If your symptoms remain difficult to control even after modifying your lifestyle habits (sleep, physical activity, stress management, diet, etc.), medication may be considered.

Drug effects

To date, there is no medication for fibromyalgia. Medication can only help to alleviate symptoms such as pain, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and depression. When it comes to pain, the vast majority of people respond only partially to medication. In fact, we consider a good response to treatment when pain is reduced by at least 30%, or when it enables you to be more functional. It's important to work with your doctor and caregivers to find the best treatment for you.

To date, three classes of drugs are recognized as effective in the treatment of fibromyalgia:



- Tricyclic antidepressants: They can reduce pain, improve sleep and prevent migraines. At the doses prescribed for pain, they generally have little effect on mood. They can, however, bring about a slight improvement in this regard if another antidepressant is already being used.
- Gabapentinoids: They can reduce pain, improve sleep, and reduce anxiety.
- Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs): They can reduce pain, ease anxiety, and improve mood. Some can give energy a little boost.

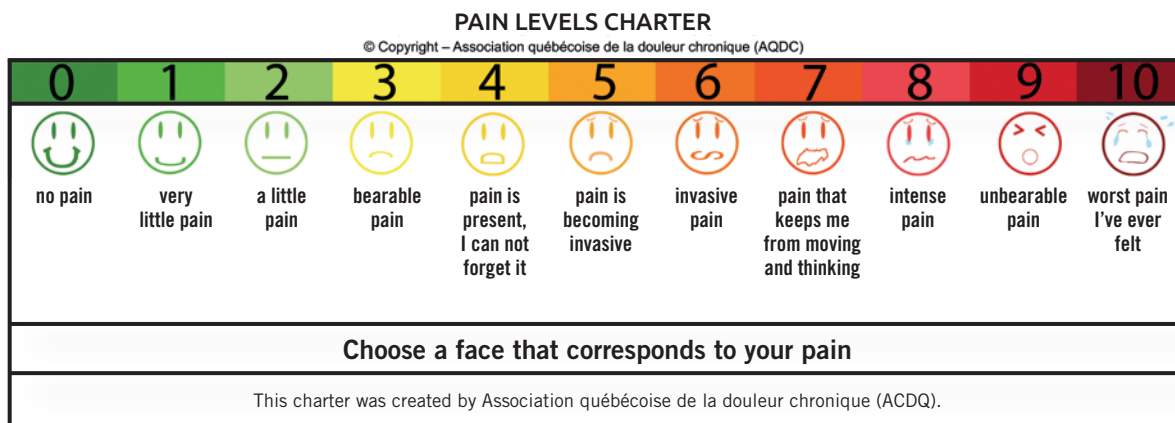
Drug-related side effects

While every drug has both benefits and possible side effects, the beneficial effects must outweigh the undesirable ones. It's important not to focus solely on the possible side effects of medication, and to remain hopeful of experiencing their benefits over time.

Most medication side effects are temporary and often disappear after a few days or weeks of continuous use. Before being approved by public-health bodies such as Health Canada, all prescription drugs are first subjected to extensive studies involving thousands of people.

Assessment of pain level

Often, your doctor will ask you indicate how much pain you feel on a scale of 0 (no pain) to 10 (the most intolerable pain possible). The descriptions under each face can help you so read them carefully. When used correctly, this scale will enable you and your doctor to measure the effectiveness of your treatment.



It's important to note that it's the level of pain felt (mild, strong, unbearable, etc.) that should be noted, not the intensity of the emotions this pain might cause you (anger, discouragement, etc.).

WORKING WITH FIBROMYALGIA

Although the impact of fibromyalgia on daily life can vary from person to person, the majority of people with fibromyalgia are able to work. The main objective of fibromyalgia treatment is to enable you to lead as normal a life as possible.

If you are having significant difficulties at work, it is important to look at adaptations to various aspects of the job before considering medical leave. Here are a few examples:

- **Schedule:** adjust the number of hours or days worked per week; adopt a flexible schedule.
- **Tasks:** Adapt the quantity, scope, frequency, and order of tasks; review work pace and productivity requirements; and alternate between more and less demanding tasks.
- **Environment/workstation:** Adapt your workstation to make it ergonomic, sit down when necessary, share responsibilities with colleagues, consider telecommuting, etc.

If necessary, you can ask for help from a professional, such as an ergonomist or occupational therapist. Some companies also offer support, such as through health and safety committees.



What you need to know before considering medical leave

Although time off work may sometimes be necessary, it's essential to note that it can lead to isolation and a loss of the worker's role, which can make them feel useless. It's also important to note that the longer you're off work, the more you lose the rhythm of your daily activities, which can lead to anxiety when you return to work.

SUMMARY

Fibromyalgia is a chronic disease for which there is currently no cure. By gaining a better understanding of the disease and setting realistic goals, however, it is usually possible to achieve significant improvement. Although it's rare for the pain to disappear completely

and recovery to be total, it's often possible to control pain and lead an active, satisfying life. Above all, it's important not to let fibromyalgia become the focus of your life. Remember: physical activity is the cornerstone of your treatment, so live life to the fullest!

USEFUL RESOURCES

Fibromyalgia association nearest you

www.sqf.quebec

Association québécoise de la douleur chronique

www.aqdc.info

Directory of Quebec pain-management resources

www.gerermadouleur.ca/en/

Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec

To find the contact details of an occupational therapist: oeq.org/m-informer/trouver-un-ergotherapeute.html

Ordre des psychologues du Québec

Find contact information for psychologists specializing in cognitive-behavioural therapy, and even in the treatment of chronic pain: www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/english

Move50+

www.move50plus.ca/en/

FOR MORE RESOURCES, CONTACT THE SOCIÉTÉ QUÉBÉCOISE DE LA FIBROMYALGIE:

450 933-6530

info@sqf.quebec

www.sqf.quebec

These websites provide book suggestions and information to help you with your condition.

Physical exercise

- Regional associations working with fibromyalgia sufferers have agreements with several organizations offering physical training specially adapted to their condition.
- Some university rehabilitation clinics, such as the Clinique universitaire de réadaptation de l'Estrie (CURE) (www.coopcure.com), offer individualized or group services at affordable prices to support you in the progressive practice of physical exercise.

Sleep

- To find out more about sleep hygiene: fondationsommeil.com/les-10-bonnes-habitudes-adopter.

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Votre association de fibromyalgie :