



viewpoints
ON HEALTH

SUPPLEMENT TO
Reader's
Digest

FIBROMYALGIA

A real and treatable condition.

Neurological pain research is advancing our understanding of fibromyalgia and how to manage it. Learn more inside.

Viewpoints on Health has been developed to provide healthcare information to Reader's Digest subscribers.

What is fibromyalgia, really?

Fibromyalgia is a very real condition. The core symptom is chronic widespread pain accompanied by areas of tenderness, sleep problems, and fatigue. Tenderness is commonly felt throughout the body in people with fibromyalgia. “Tender points” are painful lumps that develop in tight bands of muscle, and form when the muscle contracts and doesn’t fully release. These tender points are used as one of the tools to classify patients with fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia is most commonly classified using the following other criteria:

- Presence of widespread pain for at least three months
- Pain on the right, left sides of the body
- Pain above, below the waist
- Pain in the neck, back or shoulders
- Pain at the tender points

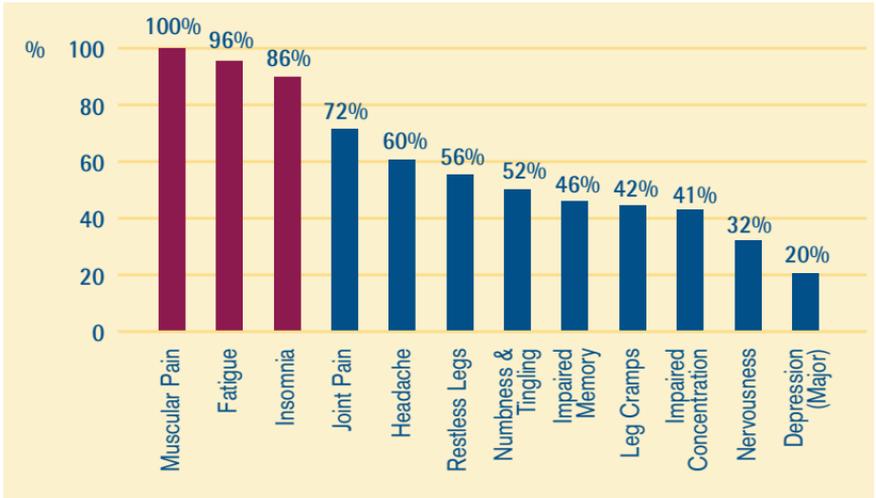
Individuals with fibromyalgia may have a range of about 20 possible symptoms. Along with pain, sleep problems are a key part of fibromyalgia: from 70-90% of people with fibromyalgia

have trouble getting enough restorative sleep, and feel very tired all the time. These symptoms were reported by a study of 293 patients with diagnosed fibromyalgia.

These problems with pain and sleep disruption can touch all areas of your life. Fibromyalgia cause you to feel anxious or depressed. When you are in some pain almost constantly and short of sleep, it is not easy to stay positive and do what is necessary to take charge of your fibromyalgia. In this booklet, you will meet two women who have managed to do just that. Joyce and Lynn combined have more than 50 years of experience living with fibromyalgia between them. As you will learn from these two inspiring women, there is a lot you can do to make living with fibromyalgia easier.

Why treat fibromyalgia?

Someone like Joyce, who has had fibromyalgia for almost 20 years, would say it’s important to treat fibromyalgia “to keep it from taking over your life.” Persistent pain from fibromyalgia can have a negative impact on your quality of



life. It can affect your sleep patterns, relationships, your ability to enjoy your usual recreational and social activities, your posture and mobility, and your mental well-being. Mood symptoms may occur because of the unwanted changes that fibromyalgia can impose in your life.

The invisible illness

As well, it may be natural to become frustrated and unhappy when you have an illness that isn't always easily recognized by others—especially if you don't know what's causing your symptoms. Joyce's experience is not uncommon.

"I went through a lot of anxiety before they discovered what I had. I was so relieved to find out that there is a name for what I was going through. You can go to work with your makeup on and all dressed up, and be in the most awful pain. People just don't believe you, because you look fine."

When you feel you are facing an enemy that no one can see but you, it is time to reach out. You can work effectively with your doctor (and other health care providers) to manage fibromyalgia. Knowing a bit about fibromyalgia and how to describe your symptoms to your doctor will help you collaborate in your own care, so you can get the best possible results from your treatment.

Partner with your doctor to manage fibromyalgia

If you are experiencing symptoms of fibromyalgia, make an appointment to be assessed by your physician. It is best to act now. Here's why:

- It can take time and persistence to identify and diagnose fibromyalgia.
- Although it cannot be diagnosed with a blood test or X-ray, it is a very real physiological condition.
- Prompt diagnosis and multidisciplinary therapy translate into better overall results. That makes it even more important that you see your physician promptly.

Getting a formal medical diagnosis is an important step. It confirms what you knew all along: that your symptoms are caused by a real condition—they aren't "just all in your head." However, management of your symptoms will require your active participation throughout the process. Medical treatment is only one important tool in living well with fibromyalgia. Don't stop there.

Reach out for answers

Remember that there are many people out there living with fibromyalgia who understand, and

who will help you in your search for remedies that work for you. Lynn Cooper is one of those people, and she has a whole network of support with her. In 2002, sixteen years after beginning her battle with fibromyalgia, Lynn helped establish the Canadian Pain Coalition and is currently president. "We're the voice of the six million Canadians who live with all types of pain," she says proudly; it's a partnership of people that includes patient groups, health professionals, and pain researchers.

Lynn would like to see individuals newly diagnosed with fibromyalgia gain faster access to clear information about how to manage their symptoms—and not have to hunt and peck over many years as she did. The Canadian Pain Coalition website is a great source of information, and can help you connect with others living with conditions such as fibromyalgia.

Joyce also stresses the benefits of education and support. She took a short pain management course for people with fibromyalgia. "It was hugely helpful. A doctor and a nurse explained what we might experience, and how to get through it. Everyone attending had fibromyalgia. Just talking to

one another helped a great deal. I learned so much.” The Canadian Pain Coalition at www.canadian-paincoalition.ca can help you find pain management clinics, support groups, educational courses, and even online and video resources you can use at home.

Fibromyalgia can be managed

Help for fibromyalgia may come in many forms and from many sources: those who are managing their symptoms most successfully end up using a wide variety of treatments. What works for one individual may not work for another. Be sure to explore all your options. Your efforts will pay off, according to Lynn. “At first, you may spend a lot of time trying to find the modalities that work for you. Once you identify those treatments and begin using them, it frees you up to get moving forward with your life.”

Treatments include:

- disease-specific measures
- drug therapy
- non-drug therapy (e.g., cognitive behaviour therapy, acupuncture, massage)
- lifestyle changes (such as adopting healthy nutrition and exercise habits)

What can you do?

A lot, Lynn says. It’s all in your attitude. “Some people with fibromyalgia never shift out of their ‘acute’ mode of thinking. They’re waiting for someone or something to fix it. When you finally accept that there is no single remedy, you change how you deal with the problem. You’re no longer searching for a cure. Instead you are looking to manage the symptoms and change your lifestyle to accommodate those symptoms.” By accepting the realities of fibromyalgia and persisting with a range of management techniques, Lynn has been able to take charge of her life with fibromyalgia.

Live well. Lifestyle changes such as eating healthy and getting enough exercise can go a long way toward helping you feel better.

Keep moving. In addition to helping maintain mobility and muscle strength, exercise is well known to promote the release of your body’s own painkillers, endorphins. Try going for a walk or a swim. Swimming is helpful for people with pain because it is a gentle, low-impact exercise that is easy on sore muscles, joints, and bones. Yoga is often used by people with

long-term pain conditions; its breathing techniques promote muscle relaxation. As well, a variety of gentle exercise programs have been especially developed for people with pain.

Check your attitude. Although living with pain and fatigue can bring you down, it's important to remain positive. If you find yourself feeling discouraged, it's important to talk to someone. Feeling down for more than a day or two can interfere with your ability to manage your symptoms and gain control over your fibromyalgia. You may want to join a fibromyalgia support group, or try cognitive behavioural training to learn how you can reframe your negative thoughts. Just confiding in someone who understands may help you feel better.

Live by the Three Ps. There are many coping mechanisms people with fibromyalgia use to stay engaged and active. Lynn says, "Over the years, I've developed a lot of coping mechanisms. I live my life by what I call the Three Ps: pacing, prioritizing, and planning. That means not overdoing it, choosing what's most important when you can't do it all, and making plans based on your own experience of how your pain levels change during

the day or in relation to specific activities. (Keeping a pain diary for a few weeks can help you—and your doctor—recognize how various activities affect your symptoms.) Lynn says: "Living by the Three Ps may seem difficult at first, but it becomes second nature if you really work at it."

Feeling misunderstood?

It doesn't seem fair that you have to deal not only with your symptoms, but also with the attitudes of others. But remember that until recently even the medical establishment didn't have a clear understanding of fibromyalgia. So you may need to educate your family, friends, co-workers, and your employer about fibromyalgia. Offering them an information pamphlet such as the one provided by the Canadian Pain Coalition will help others better understand what you're experiencing.

Medication treatment options

LYRICA is the first medication approved in Canada specifically for the management of pain associated with fibromyalgia in adults. Other indications of LYRICA (pregabalin) include management of neuropathic pain associated with diabetic peripheral neuropathy and postherpetic neuralgia in

adults. LYRICA may also be useful in the management of central neuropathic pain in adults.

Other medications include drugs from various classes of antidepressants, such as the serotonin noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) duloxetine, which just received approval for management of pain associated with fibromyalgia. A tricyclic antidepressant amitriptyline, weak opioid pain relievers such as tramadol, and an antiepileptic called gabapentin may also be used, although they are not approved for fibromyalgia.

What are the goals of treatment?

Experts who treat fibromyalgia consider it to be a manageable disease. Many people who work with their physicians to take control over their condition and make lifestyle changes as needed may find themselves largely able to

return to their previous activities. Much of your recovery depends on your investment in the process of feeling better.

When it comes to medications, it's important to have realistic expectations. Pain is often measured using a pain scale, which allows patients to rate the intensity of their pain each day by selecting a number from 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst possible pain).

In a 2008 study of fibromyalgia patients, LYRICA produced an average two-point reduction in pain on a scale of 0 to 10. This represents an important improvement in patients' well-being, and may allow many people to return to some of their usual activities. Restorative sleep was also significantly improved. Participants in the study had a significant improvement in pain levels after taking LYRICA and this benefit lasted throughout the 14-week study. In the long term, it's impor-

NUMERICAL PAIN SCALE

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No pain								Worst possible pain		

tant to continue your drug therapy. If you find you're experiencing pain after you have started treatment, talk to your doctor to make sure you are taking the optimal therapeutic dose of your medication.

Get the best from your medical appointment

You can set yourself up for success by being prepared for your medical appointments. If you have been keeping a pain diary, share it with your doctor.

Don't go in with a long list of problems; choose two or three issues to discuss.

Here are a few ideas:

- Which symptoms bother you most, and how do they affect your life?
- Are there sources of stress in your life that may be making your symptoms worse?
- How intense is your pain most days, on a scale of 0–10 (with 0 being no pain and 10 being the worst possible pain)? (see Numerical Pain Scale on previous page)
- Plan to see your doctor regularly to reassess your level of pain management and to discuss the effectiveness of your treatment.

Work with your doctor on a routine basis, not just when you are in need. That will allow you to talk about all your concerns over several visits.

You can do it!

Your life is about more than fibromyalgia. Moving beyond your pain is a learning process, as Joyce and Lynn will tell you. They get the last word.

Joyce: "In trying to find relief, you do learn a lot about your condition. I probably feel the best now that I've felt for a long time. I'm still sore, but I think a lot of it is accepting it and moving on and trying to make the best of what you can. And when you come out of the black hole fibro can put you in and you get through this process, you see life with a different perspective."

Lynn: "Learn about the condition that's causing your pain and the various coping strategies, and try them out in your own life. That is how I was able to create a life for myself that is productive and positive. I feel I have a good quality of life because I'm very engaged in how I manage my life with pain."