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## LESS PAIN, MORE GAIN: Understanding fibromyalgia syndrome

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Beach Mirror

We hear a lot more about fibromyalgia and its symptoms.

Advancements in the area of pain have given medical professionals, patients and general public a better understanding of the condition and cleared many misconceptions about fibromyalgia. It has changed from a "made-up" disease to be recognized as a real syndrome.

Being diagnosed with fibromyalgia requires the patient meet specific classification criteria set by The American College of Rheumatology, which includes pain for at least three months and tenderness in at least 11 out of 18 points above and below the waist on both sides of the body.

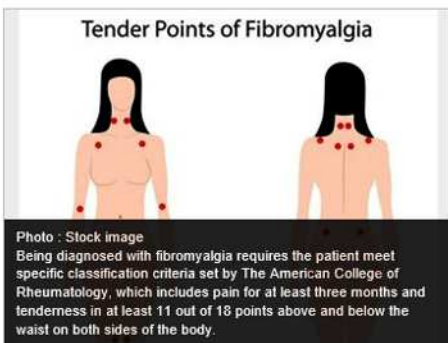


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### What is fibromyalgia syndrome?

Fibromyalgia is a complex chronic pain condition that challenges both patients and health-care professionals. It is a collection of signs and symptoms that tend to occur together, but may not be associated with a specific cause. The most common symptoms are chronic muscle pain and tender points usually in the neck, shoulders, chest, back, knees and hips; debilitating fatigue; sleep disturbance; headaches; and joint pain and stiffness. Some patients may also report difficulty with swallowing, bowel and bladder abnormalities, numbness and tingling and cognitive dysfunction such as depression and anxiety.

### Who gets fibromyalgia syndrome?

Fibromyalgia is the most common chronic pain condition with long-term body-wide pain. American Chronic Pain Association estimates more than five million Americans are living with fibromyalgia syndrome majority of them are women diagnosed between the ages of 20 to 50 years. However, the condition also occurs in men and children of all ethnic groups. The disorder is often seen in families, among siblings or mothers and their children.

### What causes fibromyalgia syndrome?

The cause or causes of fibromyalgia syndrome remain a mystery; however a number of possible factors such as repetitive or sudden physical trauma to body, emotional stressful events and illness may be involved. Fibromyalgia can occur for no reason at all. It may be due to a genetic disorder, which predisposes a percentage of population to developing the syndrome. Symptoms can range from moderate to severe and may have a slow progress. The pain is unpredictable and can strike at any moment. This significantly impacts patients' daily and family activities as well as work and social life.

Regardless of what causes fibromyalgia syndrome, most researchers agree patients suffer from an overly sensitive central nervous system that amplifies pain messages as such that a light touch on skin from clothing or a slight breeze could feel extremely painful.

### How to manage fibromyalgia syndrome?

The aim of treating fibromyalgia syndrome is to reduce pain and associated symptoms and to improve quality of life. Although research efforts for developing medication for treating fibromyalgia syndrome have expanded over the past decade, this condition remains challenging. Most of medications used for managing fibromyalgia pain are aimed at normalizing patients' nervous system sensitivity and managing cognitive and sleep dysfunctions.

Like any other chronic pain condition, a variety of treatment options are available to patients, however education, exercise and psychological interventions in addition to medication are essential components of a successful management plan.

Clinical research has shown that patients who understand the nature of their pain better identify effective treatments and experience significant improvement in their symptoms. They manage their condition better and have better quality of life by making necessary lifestyle changes.

Physiotherapy and other therapies such as massage (some fibromyalgia patients with hypersensitivity to touch may find massage painful), myofascial release, acupuncture, chiropractic and naturopathic and vitamin supplements can be effective tools in managing fibromyalgia symptoms.

An exercise routine including daily walk, swimming, biking and aquafit in addition to light weight strengthening exercises two to three times per week designed by a knowledgeable professional, improves general fitness and reduces pain and disabling consequences of the syndrome. Tai chi and yoga are also known to be effective in managing pain and to improve flexibility and balance.

Increasing rest, pacing activities, reducing stress, practicing relaxation and improving nutrition can help minimize symptoms and improve quality of life by having lasting effects.

### Seminar

Be Strong, Don't fall, a free seminar on osteoporosis, arthritis and fall prevention takes place April 12 at 6 p.m. at Physiotherapy at Don Mills' Pilates Studio

**Note:** This information shouldn't be used as a substitute for necessary consultations with a qualified health care professional. Always consult a medically trained professional with questions and concerns you have regarding your medical condition.

*Gita Mikal is the founder of Pain Management&Fibromyalgia Centre and Physiotherapy at Don Mills. Gita is a practicing physiotherapist with post-graduate training in pain management. She incorporates a variety of therapeutic techniques such as manual therapy, acupuncture and pain education in her treatments. Visit www.physioatdonmills.com or call 416-444-4800.*

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