

Disability awareness

Fibromyalgia

What is it?

Fibromyalgia is a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body and profound fatigue.

The pain tends to be felt as diffuse aching or burning. It is often described as head to toe but could also change location, usually becoming more severe in parts of the body that are used most. The pain is likely to be continuous, although it may be better or more severe at different times.

The fatigue ranges from feeling tired, to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness. It may come and go and people can suddenly feel drained of all energy.

There may be periods when your symptoms get better or worse, depending on factors such as stress levels, changes in the weather and physical activity.

Anyone can be affected by fibromyalgia, although it is around seven times more common in women. It usually develops between the ages of 30 and 50, but can occur at any age. It is estimated that between three and five per cent of the population are affected, which is more than rheumatoid arthritis. However, it is difficult to be sure as it can be difficult to diagnose. There's no specific test for the condition, and the symptoms can be similar to a number of other conditions.

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown, but it's thought to be related to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves) processes pain messages carried around the body. Some believe there is a genetic element, but in many cases, the condition appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event, such as: an injury or infection, giving birth, having an operation, the breakdown of a relationship or the death of a loved one.

Symptoms

Increased sensitivity to pain

- ⦿ Even the slightest touch is painful
- ⦿ Pain may continue for much longer than it would normally.

Muscle problems

- ⦿ Feelings of the muscle being pulled and stretched
- ⦿ Twitching and burning in the muscles
- ⦿ Pins and needles
- ⦿ General aching muscles
- ⦿ Muscle stiffness or spasms.

Headaches

- ⦿ Chronic headaches
- ⦿ Migraines
- ⦿ May be accompanied by nausea.

Sleep issues

- ⦿ Difficulty sleeping
- ⦿ Unrefreshing sleep – waking up tired and stiff.

Cognitive disturbances (sometimes referred to as 'fibro-fog')

- ⦿ Lack of concentration
- ⦿ Memory and learning problems
- ⦿ Slow or confused speech or mixing up words.

Sensitivity to:

- ⦿ Changes in the weather
- ⦿ Noise or bright lights
- ⦿ Smoke and other environmental factors
- ⦿ Allergies.

Other

- ⦿ Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) – a digestive condition that causes stomach pain and bloating
- ⦿ Restless legs
- ⦿ Clumsiness and dizziness
- ⦿ Inability to regulate own body temperature
- ⦿ Anxiety and/or depression.

Some self-help tips that individuals might find useful

- ⦿ Learn to pace yourself and prioritise
- ⦿ Don't be afraid to say no when you can't do something
- ⦿ Break down tasks into smaller steps
- ⦿ Focus on what you can do and your strengths
- ⦿ Think positive and eliminate negative thoughts
- ⦿ Try to avoid or reduce stress
- ⦿ Talk to friends and family about any worries
- ⦿ Keep good posture
- ⦿ Learn breathing and relaxation techniques
- ⦿ Find activities you will enjoy
- ⦿ Laugh and have fun
- ⦿ Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids
- ⦿ Work with professionals to develop your own strategies for managing.

Contact us:

If you would like further information on how we can help you, please get in touch with us:
t: 0300 456 8113 e: training@remploy.co.uk w: www.remploy.co.uk/training

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