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10

THINGS
FM PATIENTS
NEED TO

KNOW

AUTHORED BY: Lynne Matallana
President & Founder, NFA

1 **ALWAYS** believe in yourself and what you are feeling—both emotionally and physically. No one can tell you that what you are experiencing is not real!

Fibromyalgia is a chronic medical disorder just like diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. While there are still gaps in our understanding of the disorder the symptoms are very real, and patients' suffering is legitimate.

2 **NEVER** feel guilt for your illness. Fibromyalgia isn't something you wished for, and it isn't something you can wish away. Healthcare providers have had trouble accepting FM as a bona fide medical condition because of the lack of readily available blood tests or X-rays that show there is something wrong with a fibromyalgia patient's body. However, research studies have revealed problems in the central nerves system.

3 **FIBROMYALGIA** can wax and wane, so on the days that are extra-challenging, remember that it will get better. Fibromyalgia involves much more than just pain. In fact, surveys of patients have consistently suggested that fatigue may be just as problematic, if not more so. Other leading symptoms that are associated with the disorder include sleep disturbances, stiffness, and problems with concentration and certain forms of memory. Appropriate therapies can help keep flares under control, and good self-management techniques can help stave them off.

4 **FIBROMYALGIA** "affects" many more people than it "afflicts." Everyone who knows someone with FM is affected. It is now estimated that more than 10 million Americans have fibromyalgia, and it is apparent that it is a global health issue. The majority of researchers studying fibromyalgia believe that it is primarily a disorder of the central nervous system. Although fibromyalgia has traditionally been considered a musculoskeletal condition, most findings now point to a problem in that part of the nervous system that carries pain-related information to and from the brain.

5 **FIBROMYALGIA** can sometimes make you feel very alone. Keep in mind that over 10 million Americans have fibromyalgia and they feel just like you do! There may be more than one type of fibromyalgia. Since the flow of information from the muscles and other tissues to the brain involves many different processes, it is possible that different types of problems may result in the development of chronic widespread pain and tenderness. An exciting area of research involves the determination of patient groups based on the circumstances in which their symptoms developed, the various symptoms they experience other than pain, and the degree to which they may have inherited certain genes that might predispose them to the development of pain. Insights on potential fibromyalgia sub-groups are anticipated to improve patient assessment and care.

6 **IN ORDER** to find ways to improve your quality of life, it is important to find healthcare providers who want to partner with you along your journey. Some clinicians are more familiar with fibromyalgia—and more comfortable with treating it—than others. Ideally, the relationship between a healthcare provider and a patient should be comfortable and based on mutual respect. When considering potential providers, patients should do some “homework.” Do they have good reputations among professional colleagues, and do their patients speak well of them? Do they have a positive attitude toward fibromyalgia, and do they keep up with current insights on treatment options?

7 **EDUCATION** is empowerment! Learn as much as you can about fibromyalgia and then put into practice what you have learned about making helpful lifestyle changes. Often simple remedies can have a big impact on health—and the more patients know, the more options are open to them. With new medications becoming available, it’s all the more important for patients to learn as much as possible. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has granted approval of drugs specifically to treat fibromyalgia. While not effective for every patient, many patients who take these drugs experienced significant benefit in terms of reduced pain and increased quality of life.

8 **DECISIONS** that you make while in terrible pain are usually terrible decisions. Never make rash decisions, especially when you are hurting! Finding a treatment strategy that works best for you will probably take time. Given the complexity of the causes of chronic widespread pain and the symptoms associated with it, it should come as no surprise that it may take time to find the correct combination of medications and other therapies that work best for you. Be open-minded—but don’t fall for promises of a quick fix.

9 **REMEMBER** to be good to yourself. Every day should include activities that make you happy. Don’t forget to stop and smell the roses! A number of factors that may aggravate symptoms can be self-managed if one is willing to be pro-active. Patients can control their sleep hygiene, their motivation to exercise, and stress- and lifestyle-management techniques. Attitude can play a large role in the success of these efforts.

10 **EVERY DAY** we are making advances in the awareness, research and treatment of fibromyalgia. People, organizations, companies, and medical experts are all working to ensure a better future for people with fibromyalgia! There is hope. In the last 15 years, medical science has made tremendous strides in our understanding of the basic pathology of the disorder, and advances are rapidly being made in the manner in which fibromyalgia is treated.

WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Fibromyalgia (FM) (pronounced fie-bro-MY-AL-ja) is a complex chronic pain illness characterized by widespread musculoskeletal aches, pain and stiffness, soft tissue tenderness, general fatigue, and sleep disturbances. It is estimated that approximately 10 million people in the U.S. have FM. While it is most common in women, it does strike men and children of all ages and races. Because of its complex, debilitating nature, fibromyalgia has a serious impact on patients' families, friends, and employers, as well as society at large.

WHAT CAUSES FM?

FM is a problem resulting from disordered sensory processing in the central nervous system. Due to hormonal and chemical abnormalities, individuals experience central sensitization which leads to pain amplification. Studies have found major abnormalities in the levels in various neurochemicals in the brain, such as substance P, serotonin, and nerve growth factor. Brain-imaging also reveals an abnormal decrease in blood flow to specific areas of the brain.

WHAT IS THE PROGNOSIS?

Increased information and awareness are helping to make more people aware of the seriousness of fibromyalgia and the suffering it causes. There are now better ways to diagnosis and treat FM and with future research there will be even more promise of treatments that will reduce and even relieve the painful symptoms patients must currently endure.



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3857 Birch St. Ste 312
Newport Beach CA 92660

www.FMaware.org

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