

WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Fibromyalgia is a form of rheumatic disease. Like many other forms of rheumatic diseases, Fibromyalgia is a chronic syndrome of pain that can come and go. It can affect a person's work habits and lifestyle.

With fibromyalgia, the pain is in the ligaments, tendons and muscles. This can affect the way your joints function, and that's why you might think that fibromyalgia is in your joints.

WHO GETS FIBROMYALGIA?

Doctors are finding that fibromyalgia is a very common ailment. There are currently millions of Americans who have been diagnosed with it. Although anyone can get fibromyalgia, many more women have fibromyalgia than men-and most are between the ages of 20 and 50.

WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

Although medical researchers and doctors don't know the exact causes of fibromyalgia, they have recognized a number of different conditions that are associated with it.

Physically Unfit Muscles

There is increasing evidence that people with fibromyalgia have unfit or poorly developed muscles. (It is not yet known whether unfit muscles are the cause or the result of fibromyalgia.)

Sleep Disturbances

Another interesting clue as to the cause of fibromyalgia comes from sleep laboratory studies. Tests of people with fibromyalgia often show a sleep disorder in which the deepest or most restful stage of sleep (stage IV) is disturbed or interrupted. Doctors refer to this disturbance as "alpha intrusion of stage IV sleep."

Sleep disturbances may be responsible, in part, for the low energy levels experienced by people with fibromyalgia.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FIBROMYALGIA?

Pain

The major symptom of fibromyalgia is pain. Most people feel the pain of fibromyalgia as aching, stiffness and tenderness around joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments. Pain may appear in one or more locations at the same time and also in many different parts of your body.

Fatigue

Fatigue is sometimes the most debilitating aspect of fibromyalgia. Some people experience fatigue as a lack of muscle endurance, while others describe the fatigue as an overall sense of lack of energy. Much of the fatigue is thought to result from a lack of restful sleep.

You may find it helpful to schedule a rest period during your day, if possible. A nap or time spent relaxing in bed may help you to face your activities more efficiently.

HOW IS FIBROMYALGIA TREATED?

Improving Sleep

Improving the quality of your sleep will be a major part of your treatment plan. If you haven't already done so, it may help to limit or entirely omit caffeine, alcohol and nicotine from your diet, since these have been proven to lower the quality of your sleep.

Exercise

Recent studies have shown that people can get a sustained benefit by participating in an aerobic exercise program. Aerobic exercise involves some form of activity that causes your pulse rate to increase over an extended period of time. Usually 20-30 minutes of aerobic exercise is recommended.