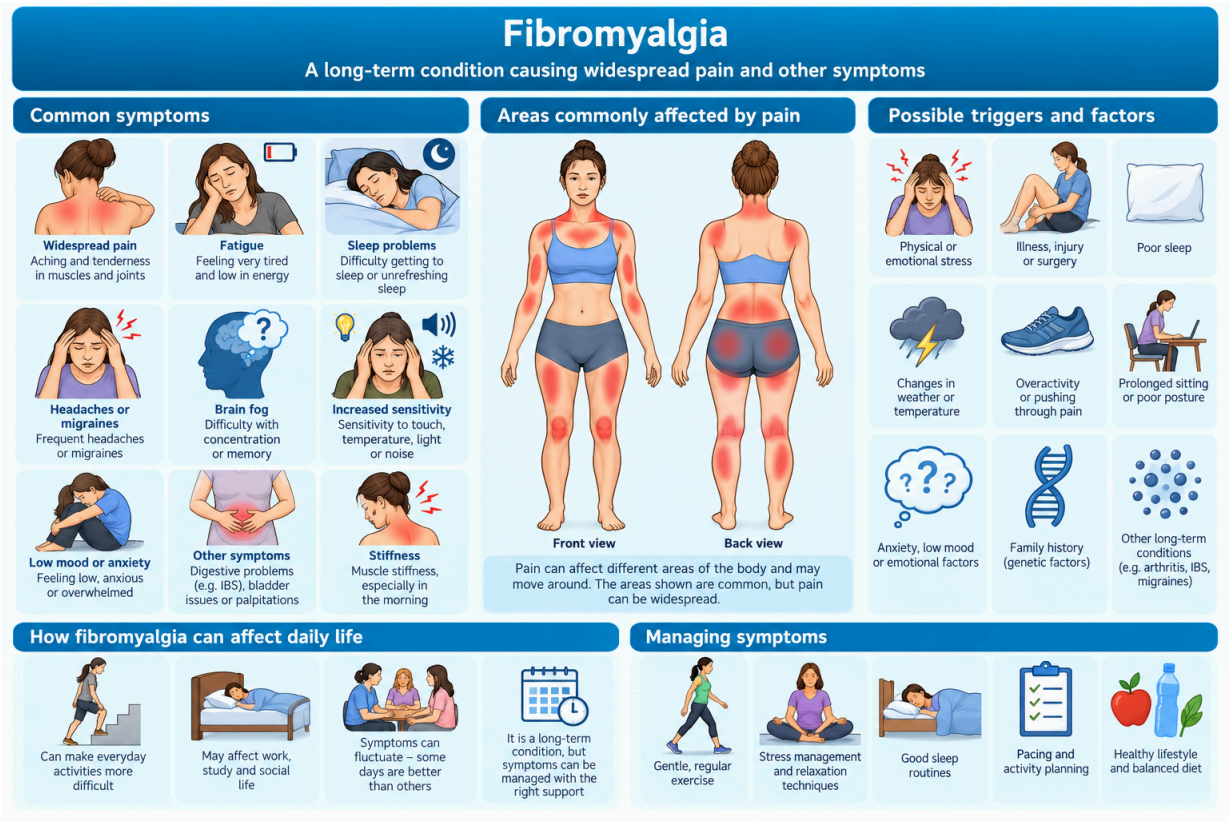
Fibromyalgia

Understanding widespread pain, fatigue and symptom management

Fibromyalgia

A guide to symptoms, diagnosis and management



What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a long-term condition causing widespread pain and tenderness. It is often associated with fatigue, disturbed sleep and difficulties with concentration and memory.

Who is affected?

It can affect anyone, but is more common in women and adults aged 30–60. It may occur alongside other long-term conditions such as arthritis, IBS or migraines.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Recognising fibromyalgia and understanding possible causes

Common symptoms

Widespread pain, muscle stiffness, fatigue, unrefreshing sleep and “brain fog” are common. Headaches, sensitivity to touch or temperature, and low mood may also occur.

Why do symptoms happen?

The exact cause is not fully understood. Fibromyalgia is linked to increased sensitivity in the nervous system and changes in how pain signals are processed.

Possible triggers

Physical or emotional stress, illness or injury may trigger or worsen symptoms. Symptoms can fluctuate, with good and difficult days.

How is fibromyalgia diagnosed?

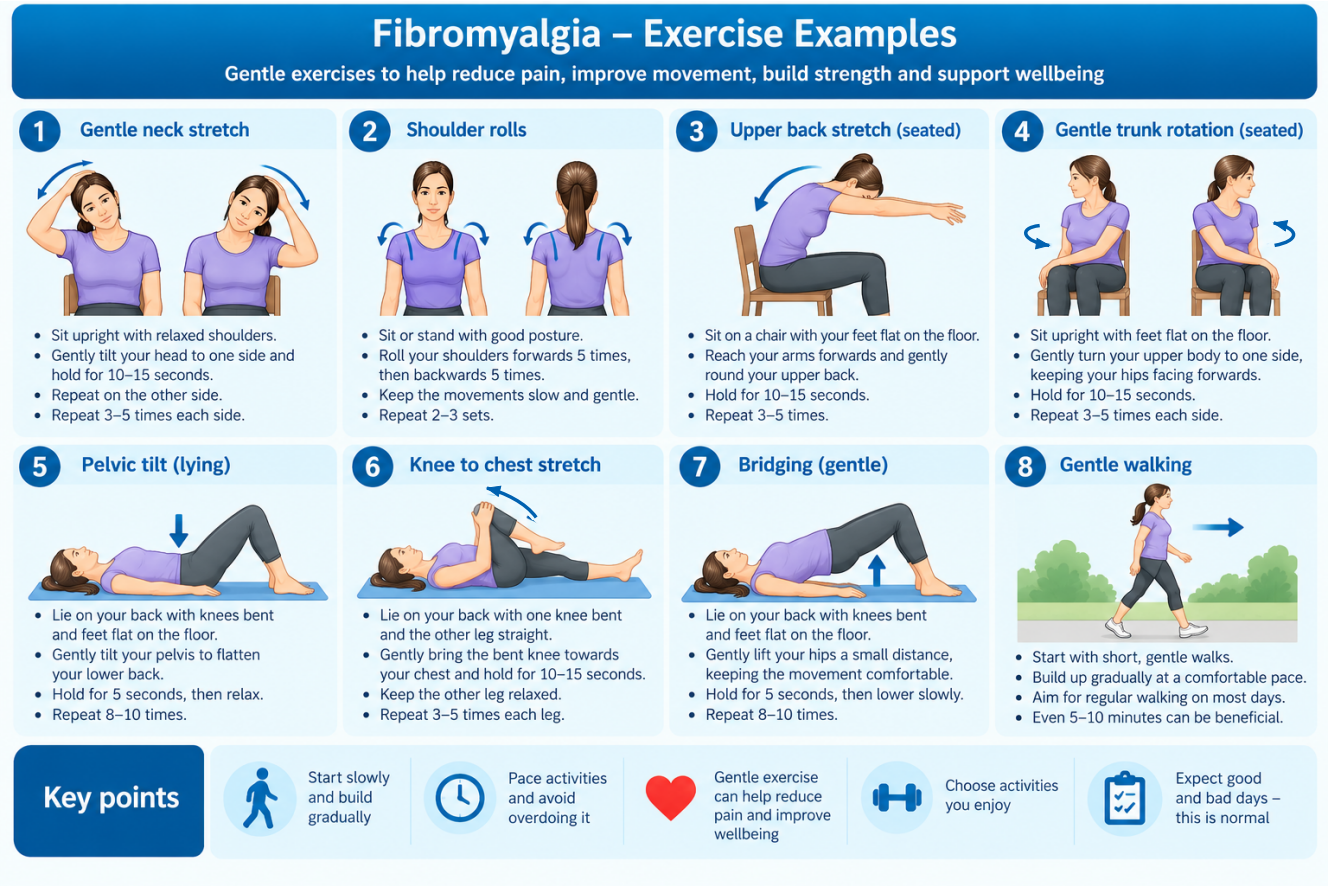
There is no single diagnostic test. A clinician considers widespread pain lasting longer than three months, associated symptoms, medical history and examination. Tests may exclude other conditions.

Important to know

Fibromyalgia does not cause damage to muscles, joints or organs. It is not caused by inflammation or joint damage.

Exercise examples

Gentle movement and strengthening at a comfortable pace



Getting started

Begin with short, manageable sessions and build up gradually. Choose movements that feel comfortable and allow recovery time between activities.

Adjusting to your symptoms

On difficult days, reduce the intensity or duration rather than pushing through a flare-up. Your physiotherapist can help tailor activities to your needs.

Treatment and self-management

Practical approaches to managing fibromyalgia symptoms

Understanding your condition

Learning about fibromyalgia can reduce worry and support informed self-management.

Exercise and physiotherapy

Gentle, regular activity such as walking, swimming, cycling, yoga or Pilates may help. Start slowly and build gradually. Physiotherapy can support mobility, strength and pacing.

Pain management

Your GP or specialist may discuss medication. Heat, relaxation and breathing techniques may also help some people.

Sleep and stress

Maintain regular sleep routines and consider relaxation or stress-management techniques to help manage flare-ups.

Pacing and flare-ups

Balance activity and rest. Break tasks into manageable steps and avoid doing too much on better days.

Speak to your GP or physiotherapist if symptoms worsen or affect daily life.

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