

Facing Fibromyalgia

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Aches and pains are a part of life. They come and go depending on our activity level, but some people develop aches and pains that don't go away. They can become chronic and severe enough to disrupt the normal activities of daily living. Director of Mayo Executive Health Program, Michael A. Covalciuc, M.D., M.P.H., discusses one such condition: fibromyalgia.



Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition characterized by widespread pain in muscles, ligaments and tendons. The condition is more common in women than in men, and the number of individuals affected increases with age. The diagnosis of fibromyalgia requires the presence of pervasive pain of at least three months' duration and the presence of at least 11 of 18 specific, tender trigger points. Additional tests may be done to exclude other conditions.

In addition to tender points, sleep disturbances and fatigue are usually present. Other commonly associated conditions include headaches, depression, irritable bowel, lupus, restless legs, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The causes of fibromyalgia are unknown. There may be genetic components, like having an affected family member, which increases your risk. Sometimes other illnesses as well as physical or emotional trauma may trigger fibromyalgia. Some believe that these various precipitating conditions may produce a change in the brain, altering brain chemical levels that increase sensitivity to pain signals coming from the body.

Treatments range from various types of medications (e.g. pain relievers, anti-inflammatories or anti-depressants) to physical therapy, behavioral therapy, massage therapy, chiropractic and acupuncture, amongst others. The first step is a medical evaluation to make the proper diagnosis. If the diagnosis of fibromyalgia is confirmed, an individualized treatment plan can be designed that includes the various treatment modalities. An effective treatment program takes time and patience. Careful recording of your symptoms and independent reading from reliable sources like the American College of Rheumatology about fibromyalgia will help you get the most out of your visit with your doctor.

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To schedule an appointment, call 480.301.8088 or e-mail mca.executivehealth@mayo.edu. For corporate information, contact Andrea Knapp at 480.301.4864 or knapp.andrea@mayo.edu.

Have a health question for the doctors at Mayo Clinic? Send them to editorial@azfoothills.com.