

**By Dr. Usharani Kumar**

Fibromyalgia is a true medical condition. It is a soft tissue disorder, not a joint disease. Fibro means fibrous tissue. Myalgia means muscle pain. So the term Fibromyalgia represents pain in the fibrous tissue and muscles. It is a chronic pain condition involving whole body muscles and fibrous tissues.

It can be a constant pain and the intensity can change with various factors. Stress, lack of sleep or poor sleep and coexisting other medical conditions such as depression, arthritis and sleep disorders - all can aggravate the pain. There is no blood test or any other test to

diagnose the condition. Symptoms and clinical findings during the doctor's examination help the diagnosis. Because there are other medical conditions, which could mimic Fibromyalgia, they need to be ruled out in a few cases. Depression and Polymyalgia Rheumatica are two main medical illnesses that need to be differentiated.

Fibromyalgia is most common in younger women (less than 50yrs mostly). In older women, Polymyalgia Rheumatica and other inflammatory conditions need to be considered and excluded- as onset of Fibromyalgia in old age for the first time is very rare. In younger women, depression needs to be excluded but

both can coexist most of the time. The treatment is mainly aimed at pain control. Painkillers and simple anti-inflammatory medications such as NSAIDs are used even though it is not a systemic inflammatory disease.

Sometimes, muscle relaxants are used to help muscle pain and cramps. Sleep aids are also used, as patients don't achieve good sleep due to the pain, and poor sleep can aggravate the pain. To break this vicious cycle, medications to improve sleep are used. Depression can coexist either as part of the disease or as a result of chronic pain. Anti-depressant medications can be helpful as well. If patients have sleep disorders, from

simple snoring to sleep apnea, they should be looked at and treated as necessary.

Rheumatologists and occasionally pain specialists can manage Fibromyalgia. It can be a chronic and intermittent condition but it is not a crippling or killing disease. It rarely affects internal organs. It can be treated and controlled. Low impact exercises and stress reduction techniques are beneficial in conjunction with medications.

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