What is Fibromyalgia? Fibromyalgia (pronounced fy-bro-my-AL-ja) is a complex chronic pain disorder that causes widespread body pain. Other common symptoms include: moderate to severe fatigue, sleep disorders, problems with cognitive functioning, irritable bowel syndrome, headaches and migraines, anxiety and depression, and environmental sensitivities.

Prevalence: Fibromyalgia is one of the most common chronic pain conditions. The disorder affects an estimated 10 million people in the U.S. and an estimated 3-6% of the world population. While it is most prevalent in women—75-90% of the people who have FM are women—it also occurs in men and children of all ethnic groups. The disorder is often seen in families, among siblings or mothers and their children. The diagnosis is usually made between the ages of 20 to 50 years, but the incidence rises with age, so that by age 80, approximately 8% of adults meet the American College of Rheumatology classification of fibromyalgia.

Diagnosis: The fibromyalgia diagnostic criteria, established by the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) in 1990, includes a history of widespread pain in all four quadrants of the body for a minimum duration of three months, and pain in at least 11 of the 18 designated tender points when a specified amount of pressure is applied. New diagnostic criteria were developed by the ACR in 2010, which do not use tender points, but focus upon pain being widespread and accompanied by allied symptoms, such as sleep problems, problems with thinking clearly, and fatigue. Since people with FM tend to look healthy and conventional tests are typically normal, a physician knowledgeable about the disorder is necessary to make a diagnosis. Physicians should rule out other causes of the symptoms before making a diagnosis of fibromyalgia.

For those with severe symptoms, fibromyalgia (FM) can be extremely debilitating and interfere with basic daily activities.

How can you help? Become a member of the National Fibromyalgia Association. Membership is free. Simply log on to FMaware.org/membership/

Thank you for your support of the National Fibromyalgia Association. Please take a moment to ask those whom you know with fibromyalgia how you can help support them in their daily struggles with this illness. There is no cure and the best treatments are a combination of medications and lifestyle changes to improve quality of life.

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