

# Understanding Fibromyalgia

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Over 5 million Americans suffer from [fibromyalgia](#), a chronic pain condition that causes widespread muscle tenderness and fatigue. Still, it is a disorder that's rarely talked about. In fact, some people with chronic pain or soreness can spend years seeing doctor after doctor before finally being diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

Part of the problem is that the symptoms of the condition can't be seen and are difficult to describe. These symptoms also tend to come and go and sometimes are unpredictable.

## When soreness is more than just a pain

Think you might have fibromyalgia? Talk to your doctor if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- **Pain that doesn't go away:** Fibromyalgia is diagnosed only when a patient has been experiencing pain for longer than 3 months
- **Pain over the entire body:** Fibromyalgia causes pain over the entire body—upper and lower areas as well as both sides of the body
- **Pain with no known cause:** If your pain doesn't seem to be related to a certain injury or event, it could be a sign of fibromyalgia

- **Tenderness:** Many people with fibromyalgia describe their pain as a tenderness over the body that feels similar to the aches and pains of the flu
- **Emotional and behavioral changes that start at the same time as the pain:** As with other chronic pain conditions, some people with fibromyalgia feel [depressed](#), fatigued, less productive, and suffer from [sleep problems](#)

## How is fibromyalgia diagnosed?

If your doctor thinks your symptoms could be caused by fibromyalgia, he or she may diagnose the condition through a physical exam called a tender point exam. A questionnaire may also be used to help with the diagnosis. Finally, a lab test and x-rays may be used to rule out other health problems.

- **A tender point examination.** This involves your doctor pressing on various areas of the body to see if they feel tender. Fibromyalgia is diagnosed when at least 11 of the 18 areas tested cause tenderness or pain

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- **A patient questionnaire.** You'll be asked a series of questions that help your healthcare provider assess the number and severity of painful areas on your body. You'll also be asked questions that help assess the severity of symptoms such as fatigue, sleep problems, comprehension problems, and more

Even though healthcare providers are still learning about fibromyalgia and what causes the condition, it's important to know that there is a set of standards for diagnosing it. If you've been unable to pinpoint the root of your chronic pain in the past, consider talking with your healthcare professional about fibromyalgia. After all, the first step toward managing any chronic pain condition, including fibromyalgia, is getting the right diagnosis.

*Andrew G. Clair, PhD was Senior Director within Medical Affairs during his time at Pfizer Inc.*

[\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

## References

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