

Fibromyalgia

What is it?

Fibromyalgia, also called fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS), is a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body. The cause of it is unknown but it's thought to be related to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves) processes pain messages carried around the body.

It's also suggested that some people are more likely to develop fibromyalgia because of genes inherited from their parents. Research suggests that it often appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event.

Sufferers may also experience some of the following:

- increased sensitivity to pain
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- muscle stiffness
- difficulty sleeping
- problems with mental processes (known as "fibro-fog") – such as problems with memory and concentration
- headaches
- irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a digestive condition that causes stomach pain and bloating

Who is affected by it?

Anyone can be affected by it. It is most common in the 30-50 year old age group. It is thought that around 1 in 20 people are affected by it globally but there are no accurate figures. This is due to the fact it is a very difficult condition to diagnose and there is no specific test for it.

Did you know?

Women are 7 times more likely to be affected than men.

Treatment

- There are a number of options available such as medication usually anti-depressants and painkillers
- talking therapies – such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling
- lifestyle changes – such as exercise programmes and relaxation techniques

Usually a combination of the above is used.

Help and support

There are a number of support groups in the UK such as FibroAction who operate an advice line on 0844 443 5422 www.fibroaction.org

There is also the Fibromyalgia Association UK which has a lot of useful information on its website As well as running two helplines it's national helpline on 0844 887 2444 and it also has a dedicated helpline for advice on benefits on 0844 887 2450.

If you suffer from Fibromyalgia and it is affecting you at work, please speak to your branch equality officer who will be able to help.