

SOLVING THE

MYSTERY of FIBROMYALGIA

SLEUTH THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS CHRONIC PAIN SYNDROME

FACTS

“It feels like having the flu all the time.” That’s how fibromyalgia sufferers describe their body aches and joint pain.

Other symptoms include:

- Weakness
- Cognitive and memory problems (“fibro fog”)
- Headaches
- Sensitivity to light, odors or sounds
- Fatigue
- Sleep disorders
- Depression
- Dizziness
- Numb or tingling hands or feet

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Fibromyalgia is **NOT**:

- Rheumatoid arthritis (joint pain)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not cause inflammation in joints
- Lupus (fatigue, headaches, joint pain)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not affect major organ systems
- Polymyalgia rheumatica (muscle pain and stiffness)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not respond to steroids
- Polymyositis (muscle weakness)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not show abnormalities on nerve conduction tests nor elevated enzymes (indicating muscle breakdown)
- Lyme disease (joint and muscle pain, fatigue)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not cause a rash
- Hypothyroidism (weakness)
BECAUSE fibromyalgia does not affect thyroid function tests

IMPORTANT CLUES

No medical tests are consistently used to detect fibromyalgia. It’s only diagnosed when other conditions are ruled out. However, research has provided some clues that may help uncover what fibromyalgia is and what causes it.

Clue 1: Some people with fibromyalgia have more “substance P” in their spinal fluid. Substance P is a chemical that sends pain signals to the brain.

Clue 2: People with fibromyalgia have a higher incidence of small fiber neuropathy, that can cause prickling or other sensations in hands, arms, feet and legs.

Clue 3: Fibromyalgia is associated with irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis and other conditions associated with a hypersensitive central nervous system.

CRACKING THE CASE

While physician researchers continue to investigate, fibromyalgia sufferers can resolve symptoms with:

Medications that decrease pain and improve sleep

Gentle exercise, like yoga and stretching

Cognitive behavioral therapy to manage pain and reduce stress

Relaxation techniques to relieve muscle tension

SOURCES

niams.nih.gov/health_info/fibromyalgia/
onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/art.1780371106/abstract
onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/art.38662/abstract
consultqd.clevelandclinic.org/2016/03/why-fibromyalgia-is-neuropathic/

health.clevelandclinic.org

 **Cleveland Clinic**

16-HHB-1006
© 2016 Cleveland Clinic