FIBROMYALGIA 101
A Presentation by the
American Chronic Pain Association
WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Before we can understand fibromyalgia we need to understand chronic pain. Chronic pain is pain that lasts longer than three months or persists long after an injury or illness.

The most confusing part about chronic pain is that it varies from day to day. Some days you may feel almost “normal” while other days it is difficult to do the simplest task. Fibromyalgia is one type of chronic pain.

Fibromyalgia is the most common condition in which a person has long-term, body-wide pain and tenderness in joints, muscles, tendons, and other soft tissue. Fibromyalgia has also been linked to fatigue, sleep problems, headaches, depression, and anxiety.

WHO GETS FIBROMYALGIA?

It is estimated that there are 12 million Americans living with fibromyalgia. The majority of them are women, but men can also experience fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia can happen at any age but most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50.
IS FIBROMYALGIA REAL?

There are many misconceptions about fibromyalgia. Some people think it isn’t a real medical problem or that it is “all in your head.” It’s sometimes thought of as a “garbage-can diagnosis;” if doctors can’t find anything else wrong with you, they say you have fibromyalgia.

FIBROMYALGIA IS REAL.

Being diagnosed with fibromyalgia requires that you meet specific criteria. These include painful Tender Points above and below the waist on both sides of the body.

WHAT CAUSES FIBROMYALGIA?

The cause is unknown, but there are a number of possible factors involved:

- Physically or emotionally stressful or traumatic events
- Repetitive stress injuries
- Illness

Fibromyalgia also can occur for no reason at all.

People with fibromyalgia may have a gene that causes the body to react strongly to stimuli.
Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

Pain is the main symptom of fibromyalgia. Painful areas are called Tender Points.

Tender Points are found in the soft tissue:
- back of the neck
- shoulders
- chest
- lower back
- hips
- shins
- elbows
- knees

Among Tender Points people with fibromyalgia can experience:

- Pain that feels like a deep ache, or a shooting or burning pain.
- People with fibromyalgia tend to wake up with body aches and stiffness.
- For some people, pain may improve during the day, but gets worse at night. Others have pain all day.
- Pain may get worse with activity, cold or damp weather, anxiety, and stress.
- Fatigue, depressed mood, and sleep problems are seen in almost everyone with fibromyalgia.

Pain Awareness

Everyone who lives with chronic pain—or cares about someone who does—can understand. The materials and information here can help you or someone you know understand the social, economic, and personal issues related to pain.
HOW DO I LIVE WITH FEAR & PAIN?

Fear may be the most controlling factor—never knowing when the pain is going to strike, how well you’re going to feel and even if you can make plans in advance, in a day, a month, or a year.
LEARNING TO LIVE WITH PAIN

When a person is told to learn to live with the pain of fibromyalgia, it seems like an impossible task. It would be like asking the average person to solve an extremely complicated math problem. Few of us would know how to do that without being taught. But, if we worked hard and took the right classes, we could learn to solve the problem.

It is the same with learning to live with pain: you have to be taught. It is only when you are provided the right direction, the correct tools, and the knowledge needed to live a full life in spite of fibromyalgia that the impossible becomes possible.

EXPECTATIONS

When an illness or injury occurs, our expectation is that, in time and with the right treatment, we will heal and our life will return to normal.

When it comes to living with fibromyalgia, there may always be some level of pain. The goal of living with fibromyalgia is to:

• Improve quality of life
• Increase function
• Reduce suffering

You and your health care professional need to work together to develop a treatment plan in which you are an active participant rather than a passive patient. You can “learn to live with it.”
COMMUNICATION

Having a way to communicate with your health care professional will allow you to report symptoms clearly and quickly, and will allow more time to talk about treatment plans.

The American Chronic Pain Association has developed a Fibro Pain Map to help you do that. It can be found at: www.theacpa.org/fibroapp/default.aspx.
STEPS FROM PATIENT TO PERSON

Take an active role in your health care!

• Become part of the treatment team and get involved in your health care.

• Look beyond your pain to things that are important to you. Clearly define your priorities.

• Be realistic about your ability and narrow down your goals to manageable levels.

• Know that you have the same rights as anyone else. You need to be able to make your needs known so that they will be met.

• Your mind and body are one. Emotions have a direct effect on your physical well-being.

• Manage your stress by learning relaxation techniques.

• Exercise is critical to regaining your physical ability.

• Focus on your abilities, not your disabilities.

YOUR GOAL:

• Reduce your sense of suffering
• Improve the quality of your life
• Increase function

OUR MISSION

• To facilitate peer support and education for individuals with chronic pain and their families so that these individuals may live more fully in spite of their pain.

• To raise awareness among the health care community, policy makers, and the public-at-large about issues of living with chronic pain.