

IT'S CALLED FIBRO WHAT?

Fibromyalgia Is A Thorn In The Side Of Many Seniors

It's not exactly a household name. But it does affect many households. Fibromyalgia is a mysterious chronic pain condition that is second only to osteoarthritis among the most common rheumatic ailments. Yet its cause is unknown, making diagnosis and treatment a bit of a challenge.

Abbreviated as FM by the National Fibromyalgia Foundation, the disease does affect 6-10 million Americans. It is typically diagnosed between the ages 20 and 50. For those seniors who are 80+ years of age, 8% are found to be living with this disease. The illness seems to have a gender bias with 75% - 90% of the victims being women.

Seniors may be less affected by the pain FM than younger folks. They cite that fatigue, soft tissue swelling and depression are more severe. In addition, about 20% of senior victims have a co-existing depression or anxiety that requires the help of professionals and medications.



Chopping vegetables and stirring the pot on the stove can cause repetitive strain on muscles, magnifying the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

PRIMARY SYMPTOM

The primary symptom of fibromyalgia is widespread body pain that seems to arise from the muscles. (It is often confused with the aches of arthritis that originate in joints.) The intensity of this pain fluctuates, typical of chronic disease.

Victim's descriptions of the pain include shooting, stabbing, twitching, throbbing and deep muscular aches. On the neurological side, complaints are made of tingling, numbness and burning.

Usually worse in the morning, the pain can be affected by weather, inactivity, stress, fatigue and a lack of sleep. The discomfort is apparent when a person is at rest. However, it is most noticeable when the muscles are in use, especially during activities requiring the repetitive use of muscles. This can be easy to correlate if you are vacuuming or folding laundry. The pain/activity relationship may not be as apparent with the repetitive strain to back and neck muscles caused by reading, driving or surfing the web.

OTHER SYMPTOMS

The discomfort of fibromyalgia usually does not stop with the pain. Most victims also deal with:

- ◆ Fatigue - moderate to extreme
- ◆ Cognitive difficulties
- ◆ Sensitivities - sound, touch, light
- ◆ Depression and anxiety
- ◆ Sleep disturbances

Many sufferers experience additional symptoms and overlapping conditions. These may include:

- ◆ Arthritis
- ◆ Lupus
- ◆ Irritable bowel syndrome
- ◆ Tension headache and migraines
- ◆ Sjögren's syndrome
- ◆ Restless leg syndrome
- ◆ Intolerance to cold

(Sources: National Fibromyalgia Assn., Fibromyalgia-Symptoms.org)



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