Fibromyalgia syndrome: the essentials

What is fibromyalgia syndrome?

> Fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) is real
> It causes pain from typically non-painful things
> It is a condition that changes the way the nervous system processes sensory signals; pain can result from this
> It is not a degenerative, age-related or psychological condition

What can I expect to feel?

You are likely to experience some, but not necessarily all, of these symptoms:

> Widespread pain without an injury
> Old or healed injuries can hurt
> No energy or struggling to recharge
> Difficulty with getting to sleep or staying asleep
> Trouble concentrating or remembering things
> Frustrated, worried or low in mood
> Changeable symptoms – things can worsen or improve, sometimes without warning

How is it diagnosed?

> There are no X-rays, scans or blood tests that can check for fibromyalgia
> Your clinician will decide with you whether you need tests to rule other things out
> There are detailed criteria used to help diagnose FMS – your clinician will share these with you
> A diagnosis can be made when a pattern of symptoms occur

What can I do?

> Get to know about the condition – find and use as many good resources as you can – share them with those around you to help them understand too
> Be really honest with yourself – ask yourself ‘How do I know my pain medicines are helping?’ and ‘How can I do the best I can to look after myself physically and mentally?’
> Develop your support team – get to know what you need from people around you, and keep those you know help you close
> Be open with people about what you need from them
> Be curious about what helps – your toolbox is yours and no one else’s
> Be focused and realistic with healthcare professionals to make the best use of your time together – plan ahead what you want from the consultation and discuss this at the start

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www.rcp.ac.uk/fibromyalgia-guidelines