



Fibromyalgia syndrome: the essentials

For clinicians



What is fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS)?

- > FMS is a medical condition that causes widespread pain, fatigue and difficulty concentrating
- > It is multifactorial with neurophysiological, immunological and cognitive elements
- > It responds poorly to conventional treatments, including medicines and injections
- > It is best managed with an individualised multi-element support plan



What to look for

- > Pain treatment is ineffective – ‘nothing works’
- > Significant distress
- > Multiple symptoms over time
- > Other conditions such as IBS, headache, abdominal or pelvic pain
- > Pain out of proportion to what would usually be expected



Screen for other pathologies

- > History and examination:
 - rheumatological, endocrine or neurological conditions
 - obstructive sleep apnoea
 - chronic fatigue syndrome/ME
 - depression
- > Review and examine medication
- > Lab tests based on clinical suspicion, but should include:
 - full blood count
 - ESR/C-reactive protein
 - urea and electrolytes (U&Es)
 - liver and bone profile
 - creatinine kinase
 - blood glucose
 - thyroid stimulating hormone
- > Remember: FMS is not a diagnosis of exclusion; it can also coexist with other conditions



How to diagnose



- > Ideally, carry out a face-to-face assessment
- > Symptoms should be present for >3 months
- > Use ACR (American College of Rheumatology) criteria to aid diagnosis
- > Use symptom severity index (SSI)* to score fatigue, concentration, refreshment from rest and presence of abdominal pain, depression and headache
- > Use widespread pain index (WPI)* to score pain in four body quadrants plus axial region
- > Does it sound right? ie not unilateral or upper/lower body pain only
- > Symptoms cannot be explained by any other conditions

What to say

- > First of all, listen, supportively
- > Share information and signpost to links
- > Share decisions on management and support planning
- > Help coordinate an individualised support plan based on goals and skills

*FMS diagnosis requires a WPI score ≥ 7 and SSI score ≥ 5 or WPI 4–6 and SSIS ≥ 9 , with pain in 4/5 body regions