



# 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  $\geq 7$  and SSI score  $\geq 5$  or WPI 4–6 and SSIS  $\geq 9$ , with pain in 4/5 body regions