

## Mysteries of Fibromyalgia

In recent years, the medical world has been abuzz about this mysterious disease called fibromyalgia. You've likely heard of the painful and debilitating disease. But the condition is neither new, nor is it all that mysterious. Understanding this form of arthritis begins with sorting through the mysteries of fibromyalgia.

Part of the recent medical and media hype over fibromyalgia is due to the fact that an estimated 10 million people suffer from the disease. But while fibromyalgia is becoming an increasingly common condition, the disease continues to remain shrouded in confusion and mystery.

**Difficult Diagnosis** Part of the reason fibromyalgia remains misunderstood is because it is very difficult to diagnose. In fact, it can take years before the average fibromyalgia patient receives a positive and accurate diagnosis. This is because the symptoms of fibromyalgia mirror those of many other types of arthritis.

In the past, doctors were not properly trained to treat fibromyalgia, because they simple didn't understand the disease. Doctors are now better-educated and able to assist patients in determining the symptoms. Furthermore, there is no one diagnostic test that can positively determine whether a person has fibromyalgia. It can take years for doctors to sift through all of the possibilities, ruling out other conditions, before they can be absolutely sure of fibromyalgia.

**Possible Causes** While health professionals and researchers are still not positive as to what causes fibromyalgia, they have been able to pin down a number of possible causes:

- \* **Estrogen Loss:** Some doctors have made a link between the presence of fibromyalgia and the loss of estrogen that women experience during menopause. This theory has been widely accepted by health professionals, because women between the ages of 40 and 55 make up the majority of patients with fibromyalgia. Research is underway to determine whether there may be a direct link between the loss of estrogen and the onset of fibromyalgia.
- \* **Decreased Serotonin:** Another possible cause of fibromyalgia may be related to a deficiency in certain chemicals, particularly serotonin. Research has indicated that fibromyalgia sufferers often present low levels of serotonin, a naturally produced chemical. When serotonin levels are low, the patient can experience difficulty in getting to sleep and staying asleep. Serotonin is also responsible for the proper regulation of appetite, mood and sexual desire.
- \* **Depression:** Clinical depression has been positively linked to fibromyalgia. Some researchers believe that serotonin levels, depression and fibromyalgia are all directly linked. Others, however, believe that depression is the primary cause of changes in the patient's brain chemistry. This, in turn, causes the brain to release chemicals that induce pain and bring about the onset of fibromyalgia.
- \* **Injury:** Some health professionals and researchers believe that fibromyalgia is the result of injury or illness. Some cases of fibromyalgia have been linked to individuals who have a history of back injury. Other cases have been linked to severe influenza and even Lyme's disease. While there is no clear and definite evidence that injury or illness can cause fibromyalgia, many researchers still suspect that there is some kind of indirect link.
- \* **Stress:** People under high levels of stress may also be at risk of developing fibromyalgia. Many health professionals suspect that stress may be a major contributing factor to the onset of this painful disease. Even if stress is not directly responsible, most fibromyalgia patients report that the disease manifests itself during times of heavy stress. Symptoms appear to worsen during stressful times, and lessen when stress is reduced.

As researchers continue to solve the mysteries of fibromyalgia, it's becoming easier for doctors to diagnose the condition. There are new and better treatment options available. Most importantly, patients are able to live more comfortably with fibromyalgia.