

## **How Do I Know If I Have Fibro? Take the Quiz**

Even if you've already been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, take the quiz to gain a better understanding of fibro's underpinnings. Because fibro is not a disease per se and offers your doctor no positive test results on which to confirm a diagnosis, 85% of women who have it go undiagnosed, often for years.

A recent survey of physicians revealed 70% of doctors "don't feel competent" to diagnose fibromyalgia...so why not do it yourself?

### **Part One**

1. 95% of people with fibro are female—12 million in the US alone, which means more women have fibro than have diabetes.

**Are you a woman?**

Y    N

2. Fibromyalgia is Greek for "muscle pain." This is an achy sensation in the muscles, usually starting in your neck and upper back.

**Do you carry your stress in your neck, shoulders, and/or upper back?**

Y    N

3. There are certain characteristics of muscle pain that are specific to fibro. The key word is "widespread." Generally, fibro muscle pain starts in your neck, shoulders, and upper back and then spreads, although some women feel it first in their lower back and pelvis. Fibro pain is achy in nature, and though on some days certain areas can hurt more than others, fibro pain is not localized to any one area.

**Is your muscle pain widespread?**

Y    N

4. The second most common symptom of fibro is fatigue, a real sense of tiredness, dragging through the day, having difficulty with work or household chores, crashing at night.

**Do you suffer fatigue?**

Y    N

5. Sleep is a real problem for people with fibro. Patients have difficulty sleeping and often awaken unrefreshed, exhausted and stiff in the morning (“I feel old”), as if they haven’t slept at all.

**Do you suffer from unrefreshing sleep and feel stiff and achy when you get up in the morning?**

Y N

6. People with fibro also have trouble with focus and concentration, called fibro-fog. Simple activities, like balancing a checkbook, become real challenges.

**Do you suffer from poor focus and/or concentration?**

Y N

7. Stress exacerbates fibro.

**Do your muscles hurt or feel achy most of the time, but especially when you’re stressed?**

Y N

8. Another characteristic of fibro pain is duration, an achiness that’s been around at least three months. Again, some days worse than others.

**Have you been in discomfort for three months or longer?**

Y N

9. Location of muscle pain is also a clue.

**Are you feeling achy in your neck and upper back, on the front of your chest, in your lower back, in both hips, and on the insides of both knees?**

Y N

10. People with fibro are prone to headaches. These may be tension headaches (a tight band-like headache over the eyes) and/or migraines (throbbing headaches usually on one side of your head, often accompanied by nausea and sensitivity to light).

**Do you suffer frequent tension or migraine headaches?**

Y N

11. Fibro can mimic other medical conditions, including the early stages of rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, osteoarthritis, hypothyroidism, severe vitamin D deficiency, and the impossible-to-pronounce polymyalgia rheumatica. A few blood tests can quickly rule out these possibilities.

**Has your doctor ruled out other causes of your muscle pain?**

Y N

12. Fibro can also occur along with any chronic medical condition. Some people being treated for conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, or multiple sclerosis seem to reach a plateau with their therapy and get no better, because they have undiagnosed fibro.

**If you have a chronic medical condition and are still in pain, has your doctor also considered fibromyalgia?**

Y N

13. Many people being treated for chronic depression or anxiety meet all the criteria for fibro, but have never mentioned their other symptoms to their therapist. Also, many women with chronic pelvic pain who are being evaluated by their gynecologists for fibroids or endometriosis meet all the criteria for fibro.

**Do you have a history of depression, anxiety, or chronic pelvic pain AND do you have widespread muscle achiness that you've never mentioned to your doctor or therapist?**

Y N

14. Most people with fibro slog through their days doing only what's absolutely necessary (and sometimes not even that much) and not able to do the things that bring them pleasure.

**Do your symptoms interfere with your enjoyment of life?**

Y N

15. The average fibro patient suffers needlessly for five years (often longer) before learning she has fibro.

**If you sought help for your symptoms, did you hear a variation of "We can't find anything wrong with you--all your tests are normal"?**

Y N

16. Fibro almost always begins after a period of protracted physical or emotional stress.

**During the months before your symptoms began, were you experiencing an unusual amount of stress in your life?**

Y N

17. One of the saddest statistics about fibromyalgia is that 25% of patients were psychologically, physically, or sexually abused as children or experienced a sexual assault as young women (date rape).

**Does any of this apply to you?**

Y N

18. People with fibro are often sensitive to chemicals, feeling nausea or headaches with chemical smells and even perfumes. In addition, they frequently experience side effects from prescription drugs

**Are you chemically sensitive?**

Y N

19. Fibro patients often have chronic pelvic pain and painful intercourse. They're frequently given such diagnoses as interstitial cystitis, endometriosis, or fibroids. Yet treatment for these conditions fails to bring relief.

**Do you suffer from chronic pelvic pain or painful intercourse?**

Y N

**KEY:**

- If you answered yes to questions 3, 4, 5, and 8, you probably have fibromyalgia. If you answered no to some of those questions but yes to any of the others, you're at real risk for fibro.

**Part Two**

Although chronic muscle pain, exhaustion, poor sleep, and brain fog are the hallmarks of fibro and enough for anyone to endure, a majority of women later diagnosed with fibro first suffered a range of seemingly unrelated low-serotonin symptoms, which I call the fibromyalgia spectrum. For many woman later diagnosed with fibro, these symptoms actually appeared first, years before the widespread muscle pain of their fibro began.

**Have you had or do you currently have any of the following low-serotonin symptoms (score 1 point for every yes answer)?**

Migraine headaches

Y N

Irritable bowel syndrome (episodes of bloating, constipation, diarrhea, cramping)

Y N

Severe PMS (with mood swings)

Y N

Restless legs at night

Y N

Cold hands and feet

Y N

Lightheadedness when standing up quickly

Y N

Physical symptoms during periods of stress (headaches, stomach aches, TMJ)

Y N

A tendency to gain weight, but not lose it, despite healthful diet and exercise

Y N

An injury to your neck or spine from which you feel you've never completely recovered (e.g., a whiplash injury that "never seemed to go away").

Y N

A worsening of any of these symptoms with weather changes

Y N

Do you regard yourself as unusually sensitive to the world? This can include being highly intuitive, overreacting to feeling slighted, or being emotionally/physically sensitive to colors, smells, tastes, and sensations--almost as if you've gone through life as a walking "open wound" in a world made of salt?

Y N

Because the brain needs sunlight to make serotonin, fibro symptoms are often worse in winter, when levels of stress-buffering serotonin drop. This situation is also responsible for the depression of seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

**Are your symptoms worse in winter and/or do you experience depression during dark winter months?**

Y N

Because your brain needs carbohydrates to manufacture serotonin, low-serotonin women often crave quickly absorbed "fast carbs" such as bread, chips, pasta, chocolate, and other sweets.

**Do you crave fast carbs?**

Y N

Because serotonin levels are linked to estrogen levels, all low-serotonin disorders worsen when estrogen levels drop. These include one week before your period starts (PMS), the six weeks after delivering a baby (post partum depression), and during menopause.

**Do any of your low-serotonin symptoms worsen during these times?**

Y N

**Have you experienced any of these low-serotonin disorders:** depression, anxiety/panic, obsessive thinking, compulsive behavior, social anxiety, phobias, eating disorders, post-partum depression?

Y N

Low-serotonin disorders run through the women in families.

**Did anyone in your biological family—especially the women—have any of the conditions listed just above?**

Y N

**KEY:**

If you answered yes to any of these Part 2 questions, it's a clue that you're more sensitive to the world than other women and most men. Understand that if you experience any period of sustained stress in the future, you are at risk for fibromyalgia as well as any of the symptoms listed above.