**Fibromyalgia Patient leaflet**

1. **What is Fibromyalgia?**

Fibromyalgia is a long term (chronic) condition that can cause pain and tenderness over much of the body. Pain, fatigue and sleep disturbance are the main symptoms of Fibromyalgia although there can be other associated symptoms. Fibromyalgia is quite common – up to 1 person in every 25 may be affected.

We don’t yet know exactly what causes Fibromyalgia but there is ongoing research into this area. Currently research suggests that there is an interaction between physical, neurological and psychological factors. It is thought that there are widespread triggers as to why a person develops Fibromyalgia. Some people report that their symptoms started after an illness or accident or following a period of emotional stress/trauma, however, others can’t recall any particular event.

Usually people feel pain when an area of the body is damaged. The pain people feel from Fibromyalgia is different because it is not caused by damage or injury but is caused by changes in the way the brain and nervous system process and report pain. This doesn’t mean that the pain is any less real but because it is not caused by damage or injury there is no simple way to stop the pain.

Although other conditions may influence some of the symptoms of Fibromyalgia there is no link with inflammatory arthritis like rheumatoid arthritis or degenerative arthritis like osteoarthritis.

1. **How is Fibromyalgia diagnosed**

Fibromyalgia is often difficult to diagnose as the symptoms vary considerably and could have other causes. At present there aren’t any specific blood tests or x-rays that can confirm a diagnosis of Fibromyalgia. These tests are sometimes performed to exclude other problems. In fact typically people with Fibromyalgia will have normal results in all of these tests. Often a diagnosis is made when considering the following features :

* Widespread pain lasting three months or more
* Fatigue and or waking up feeling unrefreshed
* Problems with thought processes like memory and understanding (cognitive symptoms)

1. **Treatments for Fibromyalgia**

Living with Fibromyalgia is a bit like living with any other chronic (long-term) health condition (e.g. heart disease or diabetes). It may not be possible to get rid of or cure the condition, but it *is* possible to limit its impact on your life by learning to manage and cope with it effectively. It is also possible to reverse some of the knock-on effects of the pain on your body, and how you think and feel.

Research and clinical experience has shown that self-management of Fibromyalgia is one of the best ways to lessen the impact of pain in your life. Self-management techniques can be used alone or in combination with medical treatments / pain medication to make them more effective. Effective self-management strategies aim to address both the physical and psychological knock-on effects of pain.

If you’re in pain your instinct may be to avoid activity but this can lead to secondary problems such as muscles becoming weaker. Gentle exercise may help prevent and protect against this. Research shows that aerobic exercise improves fitness and reduces pain and fatigue in people with Fibromyalgia it should also improve your sleep and general well-being. Exercises could include stretching and light conditioning exercises, walking, swimming, cycling and other low impact activities.

As with any long-term condition, it is important to pace yourself; build up your exercise at a rate that you can cope with, pace your exercise and allow time for your body to become more used to this.

For more information about exercising with Fibromyalgia talk to your Social Prescriber at your GP Surgery for advice.

Information on activities with others can also be found from:

Active Lives [www.activlives.org.uk](http://www.activlives.org.uk)

One Life Suffolk [https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/](https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/gethelptogetactive/)

Psychological approaches to pain management aim to address the emotional aspects of having pain in your life 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is normal for pain to affect your mood, making you feel sad, anxious, frustrated, angry or afraid and these more difficult emotions can influence your behaviour and pain levels.

Psychological strategies can include relaxation techniques, coping with stress and challenging emotions and self-compassion (accepting that you can’t always do the things that you want and not being too hard on yourself.)

More information can be found at the following:

Living Life to the Full – offering free online courses

<https://llttf4suffolk.com/>

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust provides a range of services to help mental health wellbeing and they operate a self-referral system via the website [www.wellbeingnands.co.uk](http://www.wellbeingnands.co.uk). You can also contact them by telephone on 03001 231781.

**Pain Clinic**

Pain clinics can offer support and advice on the wider management of Fibromyalgia including advice around sleep, exercise, pacing activities and psychological management strategies. This information is normally delivered in community based group sessions. This support may not take the pain away but it can help to lessen the impact on your life. Please discuss referral to the Fibromyalgia service with your GP or practice nurse if you feel this may be helpful.

**Sleep**

The Sleep Council provides helpful advice and tips on how to improve sleep quality

<https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>

**Diet**

Keeping your weight within a healthy range by eating a balanced diet is recommended. OneLife Suffolk offers upto 12 months free weight management support

[https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/](https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/lose-weight-adults/)

1. **Support available**

**Helplines**

Fibromyalgia Action UK provide a free helpline run by volunteers on 0300 9993333, Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

Arthritis Research UK provide a free helpline, including support for people with Fibromyalgia, call 0800 5200520 on Monday to Friday between 9am and 8pm, or you can email them on [helpline@arthtritisresearchuk.org](mailto:helpline@arthtritisresearchuk.org).

Living Life to the Full – <https://llttf4suffolk.com/>

One Life Suffolk – [https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/](https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/gethelptogetactive/)

Active Lives – [www.activlives.org.uk](http://www.activlives.org.uk)

NSFT Wellbeing – [www.wellbeingnands.co.uk](http://www.wellbeingnands.co.uk)

AHPs – <https://ahpsuffolk.co.uk/>

**Local Support groups**

**Ipswich Fibromyalgia Support Group**

St Augustine's Church Hall, Bucklesham Road, Ipswich. The group meets every 2nd Tuesday of each month between 2.00pm - 4.00pm.

To contact the group telephone 0844 887 2461 10.00am till 17.00pm or email [cgormer@icloud.com](mailto:cgormer@icloud.com)

Details available on the Suffolk infoline go to :

[https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/](https://infolink.suffolk.gov.uk/kb5/suffolk/infolink/service.page?id=Wqz6X2UcUWw)

**Positive Pals**

Self-help group based in Felixstowe for those suffering with ME (Myalgic Encephalopathy/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) and Fibromyalgia and their carers. The group meets between 10.30 and 12.30 on the last Friday of each month in the coffee lounge Old Felixstowe Community Centre, Ferry Road, Felixstowe.

To contact the group email [info@positivepals.org](mailto:info@positivepals.org) or telephone on 01394 279840. For more details go to <http://www.positivepals.org/>

**Useful Websites**

* Fibromyalgia Action UK website, go to : [www.fmauk.org](http://www.fmauk.org)
* Fibromyalgia Information Foundation website, go to : [www.myalgia.com](http://www.myalgia.com)
* Arthritis Research website [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org)
* For specific information on Fibromyalgia go to :

[https://www.versusarthritis.org/](https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/fibromyalgia/)

* NHSChoices, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) is the NHS website for people to find out more about their condition, go to : [https://www.nhs.uk/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fibromyalgia/)
* Suffolk Infolink website [www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/infolink) has help pages and information on a range of topics along with details of local and national organisations who may be able to help.