



# Chronic Pain Conditions



And what they  
are

# Fibromyalgia

Fibro also known as Fibromyalgia is a long term condition that will cause pain all over the body.

The NHS say that the following are symptoms of Fibro:

- ◇ **increased sensitivity to pain**
- ◇ **muscle stiffness**
- ◇ **difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep, which can make you feel very tired (fatigue)**
- ◇ **problems with mental processes (known as "fibro-fog"), such as difficulty concentrating or remembering things**
- ◇ **headaches**
- ◇ **irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a digestive condition that causes stomach pain and bloating**
- ◇ **feelings of frustration, worry or low mood**

However people have reported their own symptoms such as:

- ◇ **Sensitivity to light**
- ◇ **Sensitivity to touch ( Certain clothes can cause issues too)**
- ◇ **Sensitivity to sounds ( large crowds etc)**
- ◇ **Vertigo and dizziness**
- ◇ **Arthritis**

There's no specific test for the condition, and the symptoms can be similar to a number of other conditions.

## How fibromyalgia is treated

There is technically no cure for fibro however it is recommended to do certain things to help ease the symptoms that come with the condition, NHS normally will recommend a change of lifestyle techniques such as exercise and relaxation techniques. Talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) are also a recommendation. Pain medications are usually prescribed and anti-depressants are also normally prescribed alongside them as fibro can have a great affect on your mental state.

## The cause of fibromyalgia

The cause of fibromyalgia is unknown but it has been suggested that it may be linked to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and nerves) processes pain messages carried around the body.

It has been suggested that some may be more likely to develop fibromyalgia because of genes inherited by their parents. However in many cases it is noticed to be triggered by trauma and even by stress or infections.

## Who can be affected by fibromyalgia?

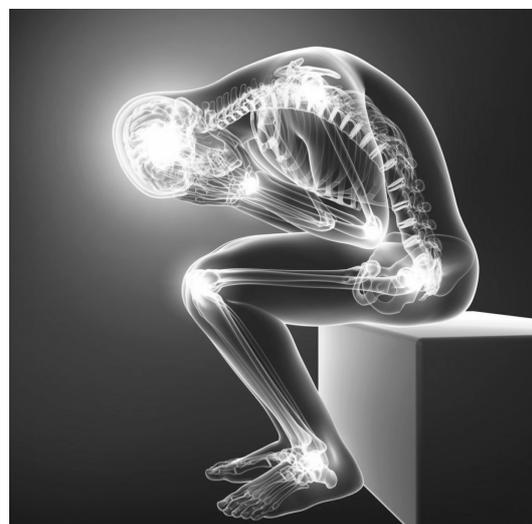
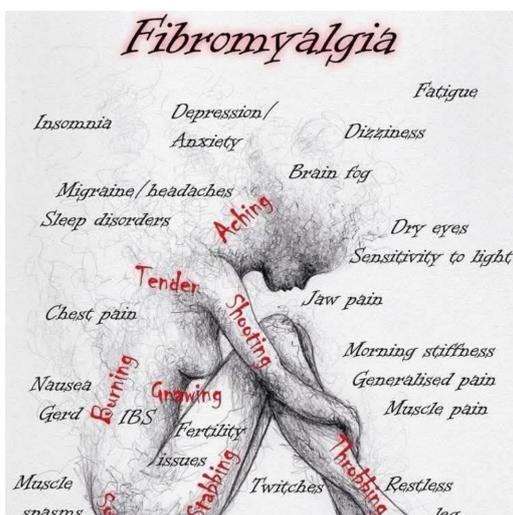
Anyone can develop fibromyalgia but it has been seen to be more common in women than men. It also seems to develop between the ages of 25 and 55, but people of any age can get it, including children and older people.

There are estimates of around 1-20 people that may be affected by fibromyalgia to some degree. The reason there is no proper number on how many are affected by the condition is due to it being so difficult to actually diagnose.

The reason for it being so difficult to diagnose is due to there being no specific tests and many of the symptoms can be similar to so many other conditions.

## How have people been diagnosed?

People who have actually been diagnosed with the condition have gotten their diagnosis due to having multiple other tests to rule out other conditions. MSK (Musculoskeletal clinic) do scans on the body to rule out conditions and there are also blood tests done to also rule out other conditions. Eventually rheumatology will do pulse checks and pressure checks and reach a diagnosis of fibromyalgia.



# Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS)

CRPS is a condition that is very poorly understood and known about. It is where a person experiences persistent severe and debilitating pain. It's usually confined to 1 limb, but can sometimes spread to other parts of the body.

## Symptoms of CRPS

According to the NHS these are the following symptoms of CRPS:

- ◇ **Burning, stabbing and stinging**
- ◇ **Tingling and numbness**
- ◇ **strange sensations in the affected limb – it may feel as if it does not belong to the rest of your body, or it may feel bigger or smaller than the opposite unaffected limb**
- ◇ **Alternating changes to your skin – sometimes your skin in the affected limb may be hot, red and dry, whereas other times it may be cold, blue and sweaty – changes to skin colour may be harder to see on brown and black skin**
- ◇ **Hair and nail changes – your hair and nails in the affected limb may grow unusually slowly or quickly and your nails may become brittle or grooved**
- ◇ **Joint stiffness and swelling in the affected limb (oedema)**
- ◇ **Tremors and muscle spasms (dystonia)**
- ◇ **Difficulty moving the affected body part**
- ◇ **Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)**
- ◇ **Small patches of fragile bones (osteoporosis) in the affected limb**

It is rare but the condition can also lead to further complications such as:

- ◇ **skin infections and open sores (ulcers)**
- ◇ **muscle atrophy, where the muscles begin to waste away**
- ◇ **muscle contractures, where the muscles shorten and lose their normal range of movement**

## Causes of CRPS

Although CRPS is a recognised medical condition the exact cause of it is actually unknown. The condition does however seem to develop within a month of injury either minor or more serious.

These can include:

- ◇ **bone fractures**
- ◇ **sprains and strains**
- ◇ **burns and scalds**
- ◇ **cuts and grazes**

Normally as you know most people recover from these sort of injuries however people with CRPS develop pain that is more severe and more long lasting. CRPS has also been known to occur after surgery to a limb or after part of a limb has been immobilised (for example, in a plaster cast). It's also been suggested that a person's genes may play a part in them developing CRPS after an injury. But the precise role genes play in CRPS is unclear and it's very unlikely that other members of your family will be affected if you have CRPS.

## Treatment of CRPS

There's no known cure for complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), but a combination of physical treatments, medicine and psychological support can help manage the symptoms. It's estimated around 85% of people with CRPS slowly experience a reduction in their pain and some of their symptoms in the first 2 years. But some people experience continuous pain despite treatment. Pain relief is suggested along with physical rehabilitation along with psychological support.

## How have people been diagnosed?

There's no single test for complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS). It's usually diagnosed by ruling out conditions with similar symptoms.

Some tests that will be done to rule out other conditions can include:

- ◇ **Blood tests to rule out an underlying infection or rheumatoid arthritis**
- ◇ **An MRI scan to rule out underlying problems with your tissue or bones**
- ◇ **An X-ray to rule out problems with the joints and bones**
- ◇ **Nerve conduction studies to rule out damage to nerves**

A physical examination may also be carried out by a GP or another specialist to check for physical signs of CRPS, such as swelling and changes to your skin's temperature and appearance. Any physical exam should be gentle so it does not increase your pain.

CRPS can usually be diagnosed if you have clear symptoms of the condition and no other possible cause can be found.

# Spinal Stenosis

Spinal stenosis is narrowing of the tunnels in the spine which contain the nerves or spinal cord. It's a common condition. Symptoms of spinal stenosis can vary. Many people experience no symptoms at all. Though uncommon, some people can experience both lumbar and cervical stenosis at the same time.

## Lumbar spine stenosis symptoms affect the legs and may include:

- ◇ pain
- ◇ aching
- ◇ cramping
- ◇ heaviness and or weakness
- ◇ tingling
- ◇ pins and needles
- ◇ Numbness

## Cervical spine stenosis symptoms affect the arms and may include:

- ◇ pain
- ◇ stiffness
- ◇ weakness
- ◇ tingling
- ◇ pins and needles
- ◇ numbness
- ◇ You may also experience headaches

Patients with spinal stenosis can also have back or neck pain. However in the absence of leg or arm symptoms, low back or neck pain are usually not thought to be caused by stenosis. Spinal stenosis is a long term condition, and symptoms can vary.

## What causes spinal stenosis?

As our bodies get older, ageing in the spine can cause tunnel narrowing and a reduction of space around the spinal cord or nerves. Other causes include:

- ◇ injury
- ◇ rheumatoid arthritis
- ◇ certain bone diseases
- ◇ being born with a narrow spinal canal

There is not much more said about causes of spinal stenosis due to there being a number of other things that can go alongside spinal stenosis.

## Diagnosing spinal stenosis

Spinal stenosis is normally diagnosed following an assessment from a healthcare professional. They will ask questions about your symptoms and carry out a physical examination.

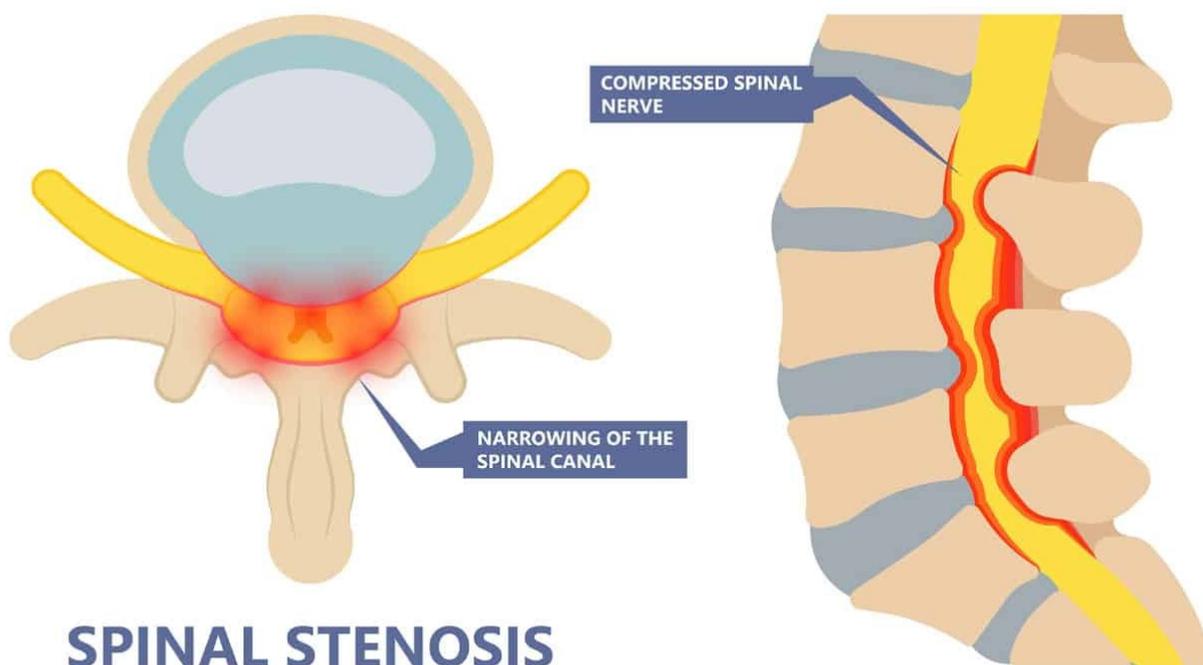
In some cases however, further examinations may be advised to rule out other serious health conditions. For people with severe and worsening symptoms, scans may be considered to help decide if spinal surgery may be helpful to certain cases of spinal stenosis.

## Treatment for spinal stenosis

It is found that normally people find that they can cope with their symptoms and manage their pain. Management options are based on a number of factors including individual's symptoms, general health and patient preference.

These include:

- ◇ **Exercise and/or physiotherapy**
- ◇ **Lifestyle management**
- ◇ **Pain management strategies that include medications**
- ◇ **Spinal injections**
- ◇ **Spinal surgery (Lumbar decompression surgery )**
- ◇ **Specialist pain services**



# Sciatica

Sciatica is something that happens when the sciatic nerve, which is the nerve that runs from your lower back to your feet, is irritated or compressed. It usually gets better in a few weeks to a few months but can last longer. It can be a condition that also coincides with other pain conditions specifically spinal related ones.

## Symptoms of sciatica

According to the NHS the symptoms of sciatica usually affect your bottom and the back of one leg, often including your foot and toes.

The symptoms also include:

- ◇ **a sharp, burning pain down the back of the leg**
- ◇ **tingling – like pins and needles**
- ◇ **numbness**
- ◇ **Weakness**

It is also said that symptoms may come on suddenly but they can also start slowly. The pain may be worse when moving, sneezing or coughing. You may also have back pain, but it's not usually as bad as the pain in your leg. And NHS also say that just having back pain doesn't always mean you may have sciatica.

## Causes of sciatica

Sciatica happens when something presses or rubs on the sciatic nerve.

The other causes are the following:

- ◇ **a slipped disc, when a soft cushion of tissue between the bones in your spine pushes out – this is the most common cause of sciatica and is more likely to happen as you get older**
- ◇ **spinal stenosis – narrowing of the part of your spine where nerves pass through**
- ◇ **spondylolisthesis – when one of the bones in your spine slips out of position**
- ◇ **a back injury**

## Treatment of sciatica

Your GP will be the one to first try treatments. These will include:

- ◇ suggest exercises and stretches
- ◇ prescribe painkillers
- ◇ physiotherapy – including exercise advice and techniques like massage (manual therapy)
- ◇ psychological support – to help you cope with the pain

If however pain is severe and anything GP has tried has not worked then other treatments include:

- ◇ a procedure to seal off some of the nerves in your back so they stop sending pain signals (radiofrequency denervation)
- ◇ a painkilling injection such as an epidural to stop you feeling pain
- ◇ surgery – an operation called decompression surgery can sometimes help relieve sciatica

## How sciatica is diagnosed

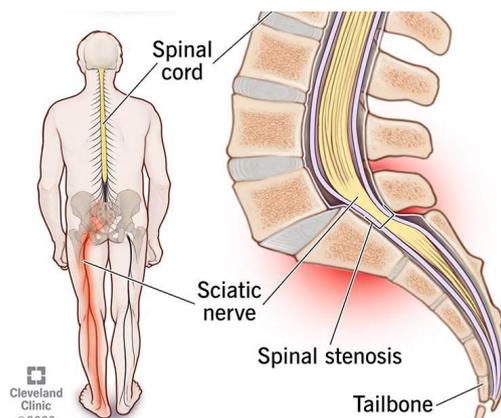
A healthcare provider can diagnose sciatica using a combination of methods. They'll review your medical history and ask about your symptoms. They'll also do a physical examination. The examination will normally include the following:

- ◇ **Walking-** Sciatica often causes visible changes in how you walk. Your provider will watch for those changes as part of diagnosing sciatica.
- ◇ **Straight leg raise test-** This involves having you lie on an exam table with your legs straight out. They'll slowly raise your legs one at a time toward the ceiling and ask when you start to feel pain or other symptoms. These can help pinpoint the cause of sciatica and how to manage it.
- ◇ **Other flexibility and strength checks.**

**Other tests include:**

- ◇ Spine X-rays or computed tomography (CT) scans.
- ◇ Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans.
- ◇ Nerve conduction velocity studies
- ◇ Electromyography.
- ◇ Myelogram.

Several tests can help with diagnosing sciatica and ruling out similar conditions that may appear to have similar symptoms.



# Ankylosing spondylitis

Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a long-term condition in which the spine and other areas of the body become inflamed. It's a type of axial spondyloarthritis. In AS changes to the spine can be seen on an X-ray.

## Symptoms of ankylosing spondylitis

NHS says that the symptoms of AS can vary, but usually involve:

- ◇ **back pain and stiffness**
- ◇ **pain and swelling in other parts of the body – caused by inflammation of the joints (arthritis) and inflammation where a tendon joins a bone (enthesitis)**
- ◇ **extreme tiredness (fatigue)**

These symptoms tend to develop gradually, usually over several months or years, and may come and go over time. In some cases it may improve but for many more others it slowly gets worse.

## Causes of ankylosing spondylitis

There isn't actually much known about what causes AS but it has been said that a gene called HLA-B27 that does seem to have a link with AS.

### HLA-B27

Human leukocyte antigen (HLA) is strongly associated with ankylosing spondylitis and other associated inflammatory diseases, such as psoriatic arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, and reactive arthritis. HLA-B27 itself does not cause disease, but it is strongly associated with a higher risk of developing inflammatory conditions. The exact "cause" is still not fully understood, but researchers have several hypotheses, including: the immune system mistakenly attacking the body due to a similar microbial peptide (arthritogenic peptide hypothesis), the protein misfolding and causing inflammation (misfolding hypothesis), and changes to the gut microbiome. Environmental triggers like infections, smoking, or toxins likely play a role, as most people with the gene do not always develop these conditions.

## Treating AS

There's no cure for AS and it's not possible to reverse the damage caused by the condition. However, treatment is available to relieve the symptoms and help delay its progression.

In most cases treatment involves a combination of:

- ◇ **exercises carried out individually or in groups to reduce pain and stiffness**
- ◇ **physiotherapy – where physical methods, such as massage and manipulation, are used to improve comfort and spinal flexibility**
- ◇ **medicine to help relieve pain and reduce inflammation – such as painkillers, anti-tumour necrosis factor (TNF) medication and other forms of biological therapy**

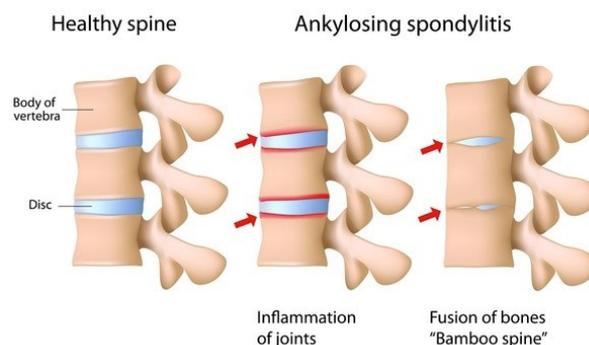
Surgery is sometimes needed to repair significantly damaged joints or correct severe bends in the spine, but this is uncommon.

## Diagnosing AS

Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) can be difficult to diagnose because the condition develops slowly and there's no definitive test.. The first thing you should do if you think you have AS is to see your GP. They'll ask about your symptoms . If your GP suspects AS, they may arrange blood tests to check for signs of inflammation in your body. Inflammation in your spine and joints is a main symptom of the condition. If your results suggest you do have inflammation, you'll be referred to a rheumatologist for further tests . These tests will most likely be:

**These may include:**

- ◇ **an X-ray**
- ◇ **a MRI scan**
- ◇ **an ultrasound scan**
- ◇ **Genetic testing for HLA B27**



# Endometriosis

Endometriosis is where cells similar to those in the lining of the womb (uterus) grow in other parts of the body. It can have a big impact on your life, but there are treatments that can help.

## Symptoms of endometriosis

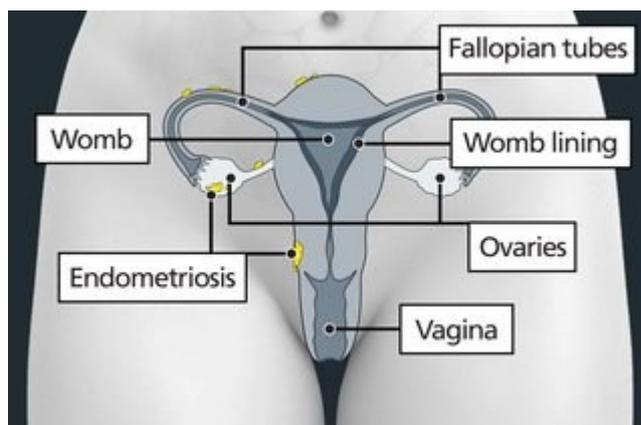
Endometriosis is often found in areas around the womb, such as the ovaries, fallopian tubes and lining of the pelvis. It also sometimes affects organs, such as the bladder and bowel. Rarely, endometriosis is found in areas outside the pelvis, such as in the chest.

You might have some symptoms during your period, such as:

- ◇ **severe period pain, that stops you from doing your normal activities**
- ◇ **heavy periods, where you need to change your pads or tampons every 1 to 2 hours, or you may bleed through to your clothes.**

You can have other symptoms at any time, such as:

- ◇ **pain in your lower tummy and back (pelvic area)**
- ◇ **pain when you poo or pee**
- ◇ **pain during or after sex**
- ◇ **extreme tiredness (fatigue)**
- ◇ **pain or bleeding in other areas, such as in the chest, which may cause shortness of breath and coughing up blood**
- ◇ **You may also have difficulty getting pregnant and have low mood or anxiety.**



## Treatment for Endometriosis

There are currently no treatments that can cure it. But treatment can help manage symptoms such as pain. If treatment is not working or your symptoms are very severe, you may be referred to a specialist endometriosis service. Treatments include:

- ◇ **painkillers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen**
- ◇ **hormones, such as the combined contraceptive pill or other medicines that change the amount of hormones in your body – these can help ease pain**

**You will not be given hormones if you're trying to get pregnant.** If other treatments are not working or you have lots of endometriosis, you may be offered surgery. Surgery is also an option if endometriosis is affecting your ability to have children.. The surgeries you will be offered will be the following:

- ◇ **remove areas of endometriosis or fluid-filled sacs (ovarian cysts) caused by endometriosis**
- ◇ **remove your womb (hysterectomy) or ovaries (oophorectomy)**
- ◇ **remove part of your bladder or bowel, if endometriosis is affecting these**

You may need to have more surgeries if your symptoms come back after your first surgery, or if surgery causes scarring that makes your organs stick together (adhesions).

## Diagnosing endometriosis

It can take a long time to diagnose endometriosis. You might need several different tests to find out if you have it. This is because endometriosis symptoms can be similar to other conditions. A GP will ask about your symptoms and if any of your close relatives have had endometriosis. They may ask to do following:

- ◇ **a physical examination (including an internal vaginal exam) – to check your tummy (abdomen) and your pelvic area**
- ◇ **blood tests**

**Further tests will include:**

- ◇ **an ultrasound scan – this may be done on your tummy or inside your vagina**
- ◇ **an MRI scan**
- ◇ **a procedure called a laparoscopy (where a camera is passed through a small cut in your tummy) – this can confirm if you have endometriosis**



# Information provided by

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov)

[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

[my.clevelandclinic.org](http://my.clevelandclinic.org)

[mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org)

**Important : Please see your GP about any of these conditions if you think you may have them. We are not doctors so always see your own doctor about any health concerns. This is an information leaflet made easy for people to access and all using information researched and personal experience. We are here to help as a support group as that is what we are. Thank you.**

