

TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT FIBROMYALGIA



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FIBROMYALGIA

How to Talk to Your Doctor About Fibromyalgia

Until recently, women and men with fibromyalgia symptoms were routinely called hypochondriacs and malingerers. Since then, brain scans have allowed the enhanced pain activity to be seen, validating what millions experience each day.

Still, the first step to successful fibromyalgia treatment is to find a doctor who believes in, understands and, ideally, has treated fibromyalgia before. From there, excellent care for fibromyalgia starts by having high quality communication with your physician. Here we'll cover tips to help you communicate effectively with your doctor and specific questions to ask him or her.

Looking for a Fibro Doctor?

One way to find a physician expert in fibromyalgia is to ask for a consultation at a medical school's rheumatology or pain management clinic. Other sources include the American College of Rheumatology and the referral list from the National Fibromyalgia Association.

How to Communicate Effectively with Your Doctor

Actual face-time with your doctor can be precious little. You may wait for weeks for an appointment and then go through what feels like a whirlwind visit only to leave with more questions than answers about your fibromyalgia symptoms and other health concerns.

Studies show the average amount of time patients spend with the doctor is about 20 minutes. Since this is your time with the doctor, make the most of it by asking important questions and expressing concerns.

Communicating effectively with your doctor will allow you to share information and work together to make the best decisions about your health, resulting in the best possible care for you. Try incorporating these tips to get what you need from your doctor's visits.

Be prepared. Before your appointment, write down your questions, items to discuss and any changes in your condition. Make a list of things that have happened since your last visit and think about ways to describe your pain and symptoms. If you are organized you can make the best use of your time and your doctor's expertise.

These three lists are useful to have:

Medication List: List all medications you are taking, including prescriptions, over-the-counter

medicines, supplements and herbal remedies. Your list should include the name of the medication, strength and dosage as well as any side effects you're noticing.

Symptoms Journal: A daily or weekly diary that lists all of your symptoms and how they've changed can be very helpful in diagnosing and treating fibromyalgia. Also, considering including information like: pain ratings, depression, treatments, sleep times and events of the day. Use the same descriptions or scale so that you and your doctor can see patterns over time.

Questions List: Write down all of the questions you want to ask the doctor. There is a full list of questions at the end of this guide to help you.

Consider bringing a family member or friend. Having someone along can help you relax and remember to ask the right questions. They can also help you remember what the doctor told you.

Be confident. Don't be afraid to ask questions. If something is confusing ask the doctor to explain more clearly.

Be honest. Make sure your doctor knows the whole story, including the extent of your pain, worries and any treatment or medication you are taking on your own. Don't be embarrassed to share details. Your doctor needs this information to treat you well.

Take notes. Write down important information or instructions, so you can remember the doctor's advice later.

Prioritize your concerns. Remember that you have limited time. Start with the most important topics for which you really want answers. You can always follow up with nurses or with a phone call later for smaller issues.

Repeat key points. Repeating things will help your doctor to clarify anything that has been confusing and will help you remember what has been discussed.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Whether you're newly diagnosed, a long-time patient coping with a flare-up or anywhere in between, opening and maintaining a dialogue with your doctor is an important part of getting your fibromyalgia properly treated. By talking openly and regularly with your doctor, you can take an active role in your care.

Here are some questions to consider asking your doctor to spark conversation.

About Fibromyalgia

How do you know that I have fibromyalgia? What tests are used for diagnosing fibromyalgia?

Are there other conditions that could be causing my symptoms?

Do you have any idea as to what could have caused my fibromyalgia?

Have you treated many cases of fibromyalgia?

Will I need to see a specialist?

What changes in my symptoms should I call you about? How can I reach you if I need to in between appointments?

About Treatment Options

How is fibromyalgia treated? What medications are used?

What types of treatments are options for me specifically?

What are the benefits and side effects of these medications?

Will these medications interact with other medications, over-the-counter products, dietary or herbal supplements I am already taking for other conditions?

What about alternative or complementary therapies for pain management? Are any of these good options for me?

- Physical therapy

- Trigger point therapy

- Acupuncture

- Massage

- Biofeedback

Will my insurance cover alternative therapies?

Can I control my symptoms without medication? Can I use nutritional supplements instead of medication?

About Lifestyle Changes

What types of changes should I make to my lifestyle?

Am I able to exercise? What types of exercise can I do to help manage pain that won't my symptoms worse? How can I exercise if I am in pain?

Are there any types of exercises I should avoid?

Will I be able to continue working and doing my usual daily activities?

Do I need to make changes to my diet? Are there foods that will worsen my symptoms?

What types of things trigger fibromyalgia symptoms? What should I avoid?

Does stress management help? What can I do to relax?

What about my depressed moods? Do I need counseling or medication for this?

About the Future

What is my prognosis?

When can I expect my symptoms to begin to improve?

Where can I find a support group?

How can I explain my condition to my family, friends, and employer?

Where can I get some more information about this condition?

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