One thing we do know: The pain of fibromyalgia is real.

And physicians are getting closer to uncovering the truth about it.

“"It feels like having the flu all the time." That’s how fibromyalgia sufferers describe their body aches and joint pain.
Other symptoms include:

- Weakness
- Cognitive and memory problems (“fibro fog”)
- Headaches
- Sensitivity to light, odors or sounds

- Fatigue
- Sleep disorders
- Depression
- Dizziness
- Numb or tingling hands or feet

**MISTAKEN IDENTITY**

Fibromyalgia is **NOT**:

- Rheumatoid arthritis (joint pain)  
  **BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not cause inflammation in joints

- Lupus (fatigue, headaches, joint pain)  
  **BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not affect major organ systems

- Polymyalgia rheumatica (muscle pain and stiffness)  
  **BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not respond to steroids

- Polymyositis (muscle weakness)  
  **BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not show abnormalities on nerve conduction tests nor elevated enzymes (indicating muscle breakdown)

- Lyme disease (joint and muscle pain, fatigue)  
  **BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not cause a rash

- Hypothyroidism (weakness)
**BECAUSE** fibromyalgia does not affect thyroid function tests

**IMPORTANT CLUES**

No medical tests are consistently used to detect fibromyalgia. It’s only diagnosed when other conditions are ruled out. However, research has provided some clues that may help uncover what fibromyalgia is and what causes it.

**Clue 1:**
Some people with fibromyalgia have more “substance P” in their spinal fluid. Substance P is a chemical that sends pain signals to the brain.

**Clue 2:**
People with fibromyalgia have a higher incidence of small fiber neuropathy, that can cause prickling or other sensations in hands, arms, feet and legs.

**Clue 3:**
Fibromyalgia is associated with irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis and other conditions associated with a hypersensitive central nervous system.

**CRACKING THE CASE**

While physician researchers continue to investigate, fibromyalgia sufferers can resolve symptoms with:
**Medications** that decrease pain and improve sleep

**Gentle exercise**, like yoga and stretching

**Cognitive behavioral therapy** to manage pain and reduce stress

**Relaxation techniques** to relieve muscle tension

**SOURCES**

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