

# Fibromyalgia Explained: A Conversation with Dr. Philip Mease

(NAPSA)—An estimated six to 12 million Americans suffer from fibromyalgia, a chronic and debilitating condition marked by widespread pain and decreased physical functioning. What's worse, many people who are living with fibromyalgia aren't getting the help they need.

Dr. Philip Mease, Director of Rheumatology Research at the Swedish Medical Center and Clinical Professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, Washington, addresses some common questions about fibromyalgia, including the tell-tale signs and where you can turn if you have recently been diagnosed or think you may have fibromyalgia.

## **How do I know if I have fibromyalgia?**

Fibromyalgia patients usually experience an array of symptoms, such as chronic widespread pain, tenderness, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and trouble keeping physically active. For those who suffer from fibromyalgia, these symptoms can come and go and move about the body.

Because there are no specific tests to make a diagnosis of fibromyalgia, and the symptoms overlap with many other conditions, your doctor may have difficulty recognizing it. It is believed that the problem is in the way that your central nervous system processes pain and other sensations, so it is not amenable to standard testing. The diagnosis is made based on your symptoms and a physical exam. If you think you might be experiencing the symptoms mentioned above, it's important to describe what you're feeling to your doctor in detail so he or she can diagnose your condition and help you get better.

---

**If you suspect that you have fibromyalgia but you're having a hard time explaining what you're going through, be as descriptive as possible when talking to your doctor.**

---



## **I'm having a hard time discussing my symptoms with my doctor. What should I do?**

If you suspect that you have fibromyalgia but you're having a hard time explaining what you're going through, be as descriptive as possible when talking to your doctor. Expressing your needs clearly and asking the right questions can help you get the best care possible. Try to be prepared by keeping notes of what you are experiencing and by writing down any questions you may have before your visit to the doctor's office.

Bring a pen and paper to your appointment in case you think of more questions during your visit. Remember to bring up even the issues that seem trivial to you because every detail might be a step closer to an accurate diagnosis. Make sure you understand what your healthcare provider says and try to answer questions clearly, briefly, and completely.

Finally, as difficult as this process can be, try to be patient with yourself. A diagnosis and finding the right treatment program can take time and your doctor will want to rule out other potential conditions.

## **It's difficult to explain what I'm going through to my family, friends, and coworkers. How can I help them understand my struggle and where can I find support?**

Fibromyalgia can be difficult for people to understand, so your

friends and loved ones may be as confused as you once were. In a kind way, tell your loved ones what help you need and why, and make it clear what you can and can't do. Talk about your pain, how it feels, and what makes it worse. With a little help, you and your loved ones can better understand, connect with, and care for each other.

Resources are available on the Internet that might help provide you and those around you with support and information about the condition. Try [www.FibroTogether.com](http://www.FibroTogether.com), a site that includes helpful tips from other fibromyalgia patients and facts about the condition. Giving the people who care about you a website link or pamphlet can go a long way in helping them understand what you're going through.

## **How do I reclaim my life once I've been diagnosed with fibromyalgia?**

Learning that you have a chronic condition like fibromyalgia can be scary. For some, the news can actually bring relief, marking an end to weeks, months, and even years of uncertainty.

Surround yourself with people who understand what you're going through, especially other fibromyalgia patients. Talking together about fibromyalgia will make a difference—for you and those you love. Supportive friends and family can make the process less intimidating. Look into local support groups and websites like [www.FibroTogether.com](http://www.FibroTogether.com).

Finally, your doctor might tell you about recently approved medications for the management of fibromyalgia. Be sure to talk to your doctor and find out if medication might be an appropriate part of managing your condition.