

Check-up Checklist: 10 Tips for Explaining Your Fibromyalgia Pain to Health Care Providers

If you think you may have fibromyalgia, print and carry this checklist to each appointment. It's a great way to maximize your conversation, and you'll leave with a record of what you discussed and the next actions you or your health care provider need to take.

_____ **Bring a symptom log to show your health care provider.** Track your activities every day along with your pain. Discuss possible patterns that are impacting your experience such as stress, appetite and mood – all of which may affect your pain.

_____ **Describe your pain as specifically as possible.** Is it dull and throbbing, or intense and sharp? Is it constant, or does it come and go? Is the pain widespread throughout your body? Are there specific locations in your body that feel tender to the touch? The more details you provide the better.

_____ **Talk about how pain is affecting your day-to-day life.** Are you taking more time off of work? Are you skipping activities you usually enjoy, or are unable to do things you need to do? Is pain affecting your sleep?

_____ **Explain the emotional impact of your pain.** There's more to your experience than physical symptoms. Tell your health care provider how you're feeling in general, and specifically when your pain gets worse.

_____ **Discuss how your emotions impact your relationships.** Your support network is essential; it's understandable if you're upset or depressed, but dwelling in negative space isn't just bad for you—it can harm relationships with others. Your health care provider can offer you support and referrals to counselors, if needed.

_____ **Be honest.** Your health care provider can't offer optimal treatment without all the details. You may feel frustrated or embarrassed, but don't let that keep you from speaking up. You're not a complainer—you're a patient.

_____ **Review your medications.** Talk to your health care provider about your medications and how you are feeling. Make sure you're taking medications as directed.

_____ **Discuss the value of specialists.** Sometimes it takes a team approach to tackle fibromyalgia pain. Adding the expertise of a rheumatologist, physical therapist or psychologist may help, and your health care provider should be able to offer referrals as needed.

_____ **Ask about next steps.** Leave the appointment knowing what you're doing next, including beginning a moderate exercise plan or taking a new medication. You should also know what steps your health care provider may be taking on your behalf.

_____ **Schedule your next appointment.** It's easy to let time slip by—until you realize it's been months since your last check-up. Before you leave the office, confirm your next visit.

Congratulations! As you check off each of these tips and suggestions, you empower yourself and inform your health care provider so that he, or she, has the information they need to evaluate your condition, make a diagnosis, and begin a treatment plan.

For more information, please visit www.HealthyWomen.org/explainyourpain or www.Fibrocenter.com.

This checklist was developed in collaboration with Pfizer Inc.