# What Is the Relationship Between Fibromyalgia and Functional Movement Disorder?

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## Fibromyalgia and Functional Movement Disorder

A functional movement disorder (FMD) causes abnormal body movements due to the nervous system not working properly.

People with functional movement disorder struggle with a range of debilitating symptoms. However, these symptoms do not cause damage or disease in the nervous system. Because FMD causes no damage to the body, it can get better, and symptoms could go away entirely.

The exact prevalence numbers for FMD is unknown, but estimates of FMD among children and adults in the United States varies from 2 to 4 percent. It appears that women are more affected by this condition than are men.

### Connection to Fibromyalgia

There is a conflict in nervous system processing in people with fibromyalgia. Moreover, that leaves them with symptoms of FMD in addition to sensory disturbances.

While the research on a fibromyalgia-FMD connection is limited, patients with FMD are more likely to have a medical history of fibromyalgia.

In fact, patients with fibromyalgia often experience symptoms of FMD because episodes of acute pain trigger the condition.

One 2017 report published in the *Journal of Movement Disorders*, found that out of 16 patients with FMD, three had a diagnosis of fibromyalgia and/or irritable bowel syndrome. Another 2017 study reported in PLoS One found 19 percent of the 21 FMD study participants had fibromyalgia.

### Symptoms

FMD causes a host of symptoms resulting from the dysfunction of the nervous system. In some cases, it may cause a clenched fist or a twisted fist (functional dystonia) which is neurological.

Symptoms may include:

- Weakness or paralysis in an extremity
- Numbness and/or tingling
- Chronic fatigue
- Pain in arms or legs, neck and/or back

- Headaches
- Cognitive difficulties, including poor concentration and difficulty finding the right words
- Slurred speech
- Sleep disturbances
- Mood changes – frustration, anger, sadness, worry, lack of enjoyment.
- Attacks which resemblance seizures, but are not
- Bladder and bowel symptoms
- A feeling that things are not quite real

**Testing is Normal**

People with FMD have normal scans and bloodwork. They also have normal reflexes and no evidence of any nervous system problems.

A doctor makes a diagnosis based on physical symptoms, similarly to the way a migraine would be diagnosed.

**Are Symptoms Real?**

Many patients with FMD struggle getting doctors to understand whether their symptoms are real. Because there is little information about this condition, most doctors do not have enough training in understanding physical symptoms.

Many doctors might not believe symptoms of FMD are real. The ones that do believe their patients do not know how to help them.

Because FMD is not a disease, patients themselves wonder if what they are feeling is real or imagined. The reality, however, is that these patients are suffering from a real functional illness and the lack of information about it does not change their struggles.

**Causes of Functional Movement Disorder**

FMD is a complex condition, but there are reasons for why some people develop this condition.

Some circumstances that may cause symptoms of FMD to appear are:

1. After a painful injury – people seem to most vulnerable to this condition after a physical injury and if they have a lot of pain especially severe neck and back pain
2. Illness requiring significant bed rest and causing extreme fatigue
3. After surgery due to anesthesia use

Researchers are looking at understanding the ways as to why some people are more vulnerable than others to developing this condition.

**Treatment**

FMD is a treatable condition, but if you have had symptoms for a long time, you will not get better overnight.

Some treatment strategies that may help include:

**Antidepressants**

Antidepressants seem to affect the nerves by fixing chemical balances in the brain and making the nervous system work as it should. You can get better without anti-depressants, but this help improves your chances.

### Physical Therapy

Physical rehabilitation can retrain the body and the brain’s movement patterns. Your doctor may recommend physical therapy alone or as a part of a program with occupation therapy, speech therapy, and exercise therapy.

### Hypnosis Therapy

Hypnosis may help your nervous system respond as normally as possible to minimize symptoms of FMD. This treatment can be used alone to treat FMD or in conjunction with other psychological therapies, including cognitive behavioral therapy.

### Stress Management

Not everyone that has FMD is dealing stress. However, talking to loved ones or a mental health professional can help you to better cope and manage the symptoms of FMD.

## Getting More Information

There isn’t much information about functional movement disorders and how they are connected to fibromyalgia. However, you can find information about coping with the symptoms of FMD and fibromyalgia.

It is also important to understand your diagnosis and get comfortable with living with FMD.

Getting better requires managing symptoms that change from day-to-day. It is, therefore, important to believe that your condition will improve.