# Is Remission from Fibromyalgia Possible?

by LANA BARHUM

## Fibromyalgia Remission: Does It Ever Go Away?

Many people with fibromyalgia notice that their pain is not constant. In fact, the symptoms and pain of fibromyalgia come and go in unpredictable cycles.

### Does Fibromyalgia Go Away and Come Back?

Interestingly, doctors and researchers don't have an exact answer as to why fibromyalgia is inconsistent. Much like other aspects of fibromyalgia, the reasoning is uncertain.

Researchers believe fibromyalgia is related to the processing of the central nervous system. Nerves are sensitive and overact to simple sensations in some people, and these nerves send signals to the brain that exaggerate the extent of stimuli.

All this pain makes it difficult to function because of the amount and intensity of pain experienced.

It is possible changes made to daily life affect how fibromyalgia responds to stimuli. That is why there are times where pain and symptoms come and go.

It is, therefore, possible to experience periods of fibromyalgia remission, where your pain and symptoms are under control. During this time, your body takes a break from overacting, and you find yourself dealing with less pain.

### What Is Fibromyalgia Remission?

The medical definition of remission refers to the disappearance of signs and symptoms of a disease. Remission can be permanent or temporary.

To date, there has been no criteria for fibromyalgia remission established by the American College of Rheumatology (ACR). But researchers, including one group out of Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, do think remission is possible, especially in people whose fibromyalgia falls at the less symptomatic end of the severity spectrum.

Fibromyalgia is considered a waxing and waning syndrome, which means it's one heck of a rollercoaster ride when it comes to how you feel both physically and emotionally. There can be improvements – some that last for short periods and others may stick around for more extended periods.

Any significant reduction in pain and symptoms that brings your life to as close to normal as possible can be considered remission. But even when fibromyalgia remission occurs, it is still possible to have some symptoms.

Even if you are lucky enough to experience fibromyalgia remission, you should continue to follow through on your treatment plan. Continue medications, practice healthy habits, including getting enough sleep and eating right, and start being active so that you can see longer periods of remission.

## What the Research Says

Early on, the symptoms of fatigue and pain might make a person think fibromyalgia remission is impossible. By the time most people get diagnosed, they have suffered from ongoing and worsening symptoms for months or even years.

It doesn't help that there have only been a handful of studies addressing the possibility of fibromyalgia remission. But the good news is that many of these studies are newer and have taken place within the past few years.

### 20 to 47 Percent of Fibromyalgia Patients No Longer Meet the Criteria for Fibromyalgia

One American study reported in the *Journal of Pain Research* found 20 to 47 percent of fibromyalgia patients no longer meet the criteria for fibromyalgia after one to two years since their initial diagnosis.

The current criteria for diagnosing fibromyalgia was updated in 2016 by the American College of Rheumatology. A physician can make a diagnosis of fibromyalgia based on the following:

- A widespread pain index scale
- Symptom severity scale
- Generalized pain criteria that include four out five body regions
- Having symptoms lasting at least three months
- A polysymptomatic distress scale. Polysymptomatic means having multiple symptoms and this scale measures severity of each.
- An estimation of the burden physical symptoms has on a patient.

One of the parts removed from the 2010/2011 updates is the guideline for no other explanation of symptoms, and it was replaced with this language, "A diagnosis of fibromyalgia is valid irrespective of other diagnoses. A diagnosis of fibromyalgia does not exclude the presence of other clinically important illnesses." In other words, having another condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis, does not mean fibromyalgia is ruled out.

### 44 Percent of People With Fibromyalgia No Longer Experienced Symptoms After 11 Years

A second American study going back to 2011 found 44 percent of people with fibromyalgia no longer experienced symptoms after 11 years. The researchers confirmed remission from fibromyalgia was possible when fibromyalgia fell at the mild end of the spectrum.

### Diet Is a Possible Precursor to Remission

One report out of the University of Padova in Italy points to diet as a possible precursor to remission, but it is not just as simple as changing diet habits. The author of the report pushes diet exclusion, which may include some carbohydrates, dietary fructose and other foods that play a part in impairing biochemical and nerve pathways specific to fibromyalgia.

### Pain Improvement Corresponds With An Improvement of Sleep and Function

A 2016 American observational study suggests pain improvement coincides with an improvement of sleep and function. In other words, if certain symptoms of fibromyalgia can be minimized or even resolved, such as sleep problems and chronic fatigue, it is possible for someone to achieve remission regardless of disease severity.

## The Bottom Line

There is little information about how long it takes to go into remission. But pain reduction over time is a good indicator it may happen but that does take some effort and work on the patient’s part, and his or her doctor’s towards finding the right treatments and adhering to them.

No single treatment will work for everyone and achieving remission is no easy task. It is also possible it may not happen for some people, but it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t keep trying.

Achieving fibromyalgia remission will require a variety of treatment approaches and lifestyle changes. The good news is that there is a lot of upcoming research, which will hopefully change the direction of fibromyalgia treatment and find more people experiencing longer periods – perhaps even years - of remission.