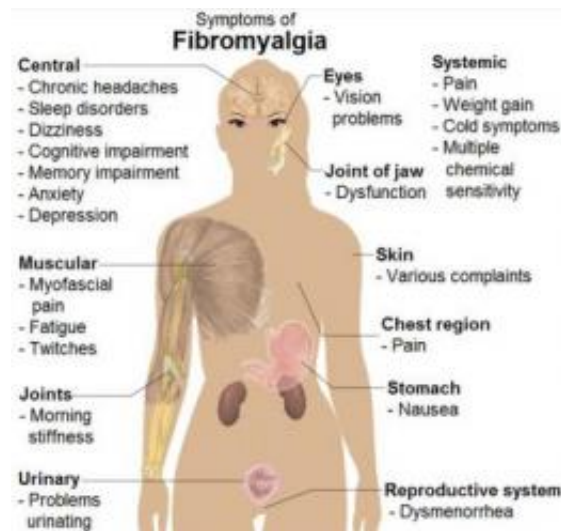


# Fibromyalgia affects mental health of those diagnosed and their spouses, study finds

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This graphic displays the various symptoms related to fibromyalgia. Credit: [fibromyalgia-symptoms.org](http://fibromyalgia-symptoms.org)

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes chronic, widespread pain throughout the body. In a new study, University of Missouri researchers are examining how the diagnosis of Fibromyalgia can affect marriages. Initial findings reveal that diagnosed spouses have considerably higher levels of depressive symptoms and pain and report more marital instability and anger than their spouses. For both spouses, the symptoms can trigger increased emotional withdrawal and mental strain.

"Preliminary research suggests that [fibromyalgia](#) is very hard on both

spouses because their lives are changed dramatically," said Christine Proulx, assistant professor of human development and family studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "There appears to be a strong link between fibromyalgia and feelings of depression and [fatigue](#), which can be debilitating for those diagnosed and their marriages. The mental strain felt by both spouses can negatively affect marital quality."

Proulx found that individuals with fibromyalgia were almost three-times more depressed than their spouses. The diagnosed spouses reported higher levels of marital instability and more marital anger, indicating they were more likely to consider divorce than their spouses. The healthy spouses reported that it was difficult to watch their spouses experience pain.

"Both spouses are put in difficult positions when one partner is diagnosed with fibromyalgia," Proulx said. "Spouses must balance the presence of the disease, which can produce hostility or withdrawn behavior in the marriage, with the difficulty of being sick or being supportive to the spouse who is sick. These factors can create a cycle that can be very negative if it can't be broken."

In the study, Proulx is studying the interactions of [married couples](#) that include one spouse who has been diagnosed with fibromyalgia or chronic widespread pain. The spouses record diary entries about their marital interactions and personal feelings. Proulx is examining the associations between marital quality, daily interactions, social support and the spouses' personal well-being.

Fibromyalgia is controversial because there is no consensus on the cause of the chronic pain symptoms it causes, Proulx said. It has no cure, so many of the couples who participated in the study reported that they were constantly trying different treatments to manage the symptoms.

Findings from the pilot study, "Fibromyalgia, Chronic Pain, and Marriage: A Daily Diary Pilot Study," were presented last November at the National Council of Family Relations Conference.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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