

Hidden disabilities

Fibromyalgia

Reasonable Adjustments

It is hard to know how many people are affected by Fibromyalgia because it is difficult to diagnose, with symptoms similar to other conditions. It is thought to be relatively common, affecting perhaps 1 in 20 people to some degree.



Fibromyalgia is a long-term condition characterised by widespread and variable pain all over the body.

The exact cause is unknown, though one of the main theories is that there are changes in the way the central nervous system processes pain messages.

Symptoms vary from person to person and can fluctuate according to factors such as stress and changes in the weather.

The main symptoms are:

- widespread continuous pain, which can fluctuate in intensity, and be worse in certain parts of the body at different times. The pain might be an ache, burning sensation, or sharp and stabbing;
- extreme sensitivity, e.g. a very light touch can be painful. There may also be sensitivity to other things, e.g. bright lights or temperature;
- stiffness and muscle spasm, especially after being in the same position for a long time;
- profound fatigue, which can range from mild tiredness to sudden onset flu-like exhaustion, when the individual cannot do anything at all;
- poor sleep quality;
- headaches and migraines caused by the above factors;
- cognitive problems ("fibro-fog"), e.g. difficulty remembering things, limited concentration and slow or confused speech; and
- powerful painkillers which affect concentration. Other symptoms which people with fibromyalgia sometimes develop include dizziness, clumsiness, and IBS. It can also lead to depression.



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Most medical experts agree that Fibromyalgia and ME / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome are similar and probably related disorders, although views differ as to how closely they are related.

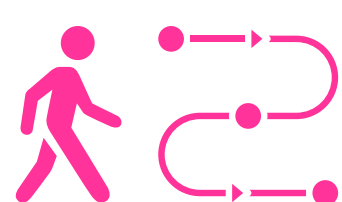
Some people feel very strongly that there is no relationship. The key point is that pain appears to be the predominant symptom of Fibromyalgia, whereas tiredness is the predominant symptom of ME / CFS.

Treatment can include painkillers, anti-depressants (which can help with pain), muscle relaxants, anticonvulsants, cognitive behavioural therapy, acupuncture, and gentle exercise.

Some of these medications have unwanted side-effects. People with arthritis or lupus, often also have fibromyalgia, which requires different treatment.

As a result of symptoms, a person with Fibromyalgia may experience the following substantial adverse effects that services and employers need to be aware of:

- difficulty waiting or queuing because of pain or fatigue when standing for long periods;
- difficulty using transport because of pain or fatigue;
- difficulty in going up or down steps, stairs or gradients, because movements are painful, fatiguing or restricted in some way;
- ability to walk only a short distance without difficulty because of physical restrictions, pain or fatigue ; and
- difficulty concentrating



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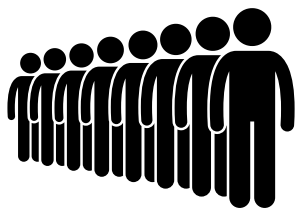
Work Place Reasonable Adjustments: what you and your colleagues can do at your workplace



Always consult the service user or employee

Depending on the nature and severity of their condition, reasonable adjustments for service users could include:

1. Limiting wait and queue times or providing chairs to prevent pain or fatigue.



2. Offering video or telephone consultations where appropriate. This omits the need to travel which could cause pain and fatigue.



3. Offering premises or ways into buildings that avoid going up or down steps, stairs or gradients.



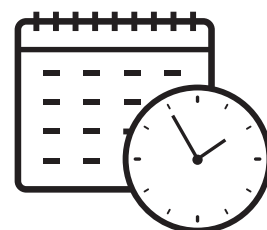
4. Ensuring service user does not have to walk a long distance.



5. Showing consideration and understanding about concentration difficulties caused by pain and medication.



6. Allowing enough time for appointments that takes these aspects into account.



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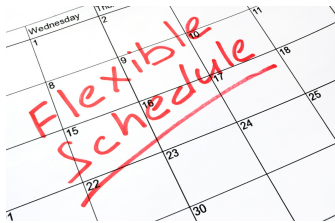


Work Place Reasonable Adjustments: what you and your colleagues can do at your workplace



Depending on the nature and severity of their condition, reasonable adjustments for employment could include:

1. Allowing flexible shifts or later start times so that rush hour travel can be avoided. and flexible break schedules.



2. Enabling shorter hours and home working.



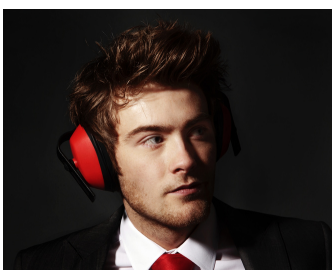
3. Adjusting lighting, and temperature control: fans, heaters, portable air conditioning, allowing gloves to be worn.



4. Providing adjustable workstation and alternative keyboards.



5. Providing noise-cancelling headsets and minimising distractions.



6. Making allowance for the time it takes to get used to new painkilling medication.

