FAST FACTS: Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia (FM) is characterized by chronic widespread pain and tenderness in muscles, tendons, and other soft tissues. Symptoms are debilitating fatigue, sleep problems, headaches, depression, anxiety, and joint stiffness. Some may also report difficulty with swallowing, bowel and bladder abnormalities, numbness, tingling, and memory or concentration problems. People with fibromyalgia tend to wake up with body aches and stiffness, for some pain improves during the day and gets worse at night, others have pain all the time.

Assessment should include:
- Tender points found in the soft tissue on the back of the neck, shoulders, chest, lower back, hips, shins, elbows & knees. Mild to severe pain that spreads out from these areas.
- Tension or migraine headache.
- Pain that may feel like a deep ache, a shooting, or burning pain.
- Pain that feels like it is coming from the joints.
- Pain that may get worse with activity, cold or damp weather, anxiety, and stress.

Treatment is to relieve pain and help a person cope such as:
- Physical therapy, exercise and fitness programs
- Stress-relief methods, including light massage and relaxation techniques
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy, and support groups
- Acupressure and acupuncture
- Good sleep routines to improve quality of sleep
- Severe cases of FM may require a referral to a pain clinic
- Medications specifically for treating FM & used with exercise & behavior therapy
  - Duloxetine (Cymbalta)
  - Pregabalin (Lyrica)
  - Milnacipran (Savella)
  - Other drugs also used to treat the condition:
    - Pain relievers (opioids & nonopioids)
    - Antidepressants
    - Anti-seizure drug
    - Muscle relaxants
    - Sleeping aids

References