

CONFIDENT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FIBROMYALGIA

You may dread going out and facing the usual question: "How are you?"
It can be easier to just say "I'm fine" or not socialise at all!
Then there's the follow up about Fibromyalgia: "What is that?!"

Sharing with others about your Fibromyalgia takes courage but helps to foster intimacy and trust and the empathetic presence and attention of safe people can help you regulate your emotions and give you the ongoing support you need.

Keep these **two conversation conditions** in mind to help you share more openly and confidently about your Fibromyalgia:

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Keep it simple

You don't need to list all your symptoms or trigger an interrogation by others. Just an honest statement like "I'm having a tough day with my pain and fatigue but I've been making progress overall" can invite empathy but also shutdown further unwanted questions.

The word "Fibromyalgia" is a tongue-twister and most people have never heard of it! Practice a simple "elevator pitch" at home for responding to people about your condition.

An **elevator pitch** is a brief speech of 30 – 60 seconds that accurately and concisely summarises what's going on with Fibromyalgia. You can choose whether to use the word "Fibromyalgia" in it or not.

So, you could say something like this:

*"My nervous system and other systems in my body have become more sensitive and responsive than they used to be. So I experience a lot of different and difficult symptoms all the time, like pain all over my body, fatigue and brainfog, that really affect my daily life. I am working towards regulating them again with the right strategies and support.
Thanks for asking."*



Keep it safe

For more in-depth conversations, choose who you share with wisely.
Who do you feel safe sharing with?

Relationships with these 'safe' people are gold and need guarding.
So, protect them by applying **6 'safety conditions'** when you share:

1. Don't ambush someone or "dump" on them. Choose a good time and place and ask for permission to share with them.
2. Let them know you only expect them to listen, not advise, by starting with a statement like: "Please can I share with you how I'm doing? I don't need you to respond or fix anything. I just need you to listen to me for a few minutes. Is that ok?"
3. Share your thoughts and emotions using "I" statements, like: "I'm feeling so sad that I can't do what I used to." This style of sharing can help you stick to noticing and labelling emotions without judging yourself; blaming others for them; or other unhelpful patterns.
4. If you feel you are better at expressing your thoughts in writing, you could read your listener extracts from your journal or notes as a starting point.
5. Try to be brave in sharing the range of emotions – anger, fear, grief, shame – remembering that they are useful clues about how you are doing.
6. Also remember that you don't only have to disclose difficult things. You can share positive and pleasant things with others too!

Reference: "Your Pain Playbook: effective daily strategies for life beyond pain" by Helen Roome (2023)