

My Disability is Invisible:

Fibromyalgia and my Educational Journey

Cindy López

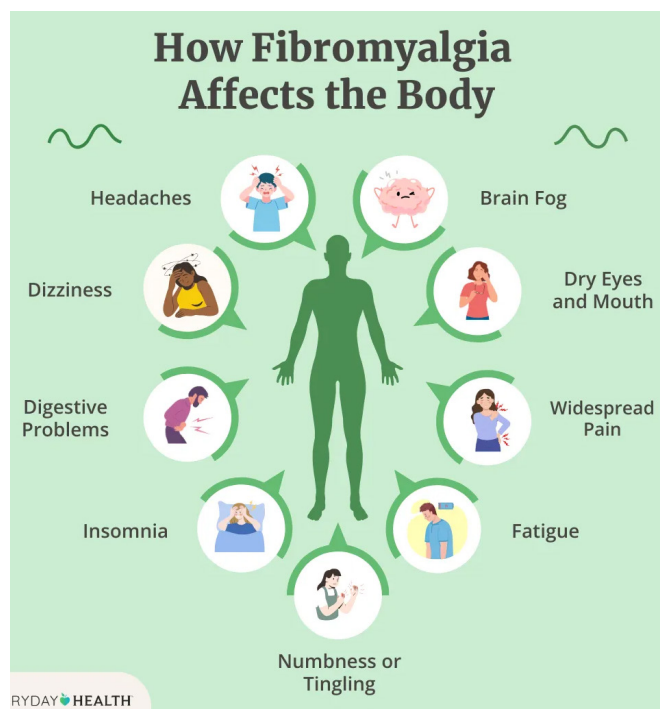
BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What is an invisible disability? What do think are the consequences of having your disability be invisible?
2. Learn about fibromyalgia in the diagram below.

You Can't See My Struggle

Sometimes, you can easily see that a person has a physical disability. But what about those of us who have invisible disabilities? People don't realize what we are going through and how we are struggling to manage our disabilities.

Fibromyalgia changed my life in a negative way. Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition with many symptoms. Chronic pain, anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, fatigue, and



Source: <https://www.everydayhealth.com/fibromyalgia/guide/symptoms/>

learning difficulties are the most common symptoms.

I experience all of these symptoms, and so fibromyalgia has affected my education. Having a lot of pain makes me feel like I cannot concentrate when I am in class or doing my assignments. It also affects my short-term memory and makes it difficult to express my thoughts.

Sometimes I feel so tired that I want to give up. But I feel committed to my goals, so I have found alternative ways to continue studying. If I take online classes I try to make sure there are no distractions around me. When I do not remember something that the teacher explained, I go to Canvas and look at the notes. (Canvas

Five Common Accommodations for People with Fibromyalgia

Accommodation	Work Setting	School Setting
Flexible scheduling	Flexible start times, work-from-home options, or adjusted hours to manage energy levels and pain flares	Extended time for assignments, flexible attendance policies, or alternative class times
Physical environment adjustments	Ergonomic chair, adjustable desk height, proper lighting, and temperature control	Comfortable seating, access to quiet spaces, and classroom temperature adjustments
Break modifications	More frequent or longer breaks to rest and manage pain and fatigue	Extended breaks between classes, rest periods during long exams, or quiet break spaces
Task modifications	Reduced physical demands like lifting or standing, or breaking large projects into smaller parts	Note-taking assistance, audio recordings of lectures, or alternative assignment formats
Communication support	Written instructions instead of verbal-only directions, and advance notice of schedule changes	Extended deadlines, email communication with instructors, and clear written expectations

is our online learning system.) I also use apps such as Google calendar that are very helpful to remember school assignments, and other activities. I always make sure to do all my homework carefully and on time. I try to get good grades. On the other hand, I try not to feel stressed about sometimes getting a bad grade. It happens. I just have to keep going.

School systems should do more for students with disabilities. For example, the school should make sure that students know about the resources that the college has to support them. The school should communicate better about all of its health promotion activities. Also, the school could raise awareness that disabilities exist everywhere, even when you can't see them. Although fibromyalgia isn't visible, it is a disability too, and it can

definitely change your life. However, it does not have to stop you from achieving your goals.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What do you infer Cindy would like people to know about her?
2. According to Cindy, what should schools do to support students with disabilities?
3. What accommodations do you think schools should provide? Read the chart above and add your own ideas.

Cindy López is a 29-year-old Cuban native currently living in Sonoma County, California. She has been an ESL student Santa Rosa Junior College for over two years. Cindy graduated as a doctor in Medicine from the University of Matanzas in Cuba, and is now completing the required coursework to apply to a nursing program in the U.S. She is dedicated and persistent; she loves learning and inspiring others.