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A Day Before Asking to Be Believed

Baekrokdam Research Commons (BRC) [1]

[1] Baekrokdam Research Commons (BRC), Republic of Korea

Abstract

This article examines what fibromyalgia criteria, comparisons of sleep diaries, actigraphy, and polysomnography, FIQR, and QST record under different time windows and conditions. The criteria summarize pain distribution and symptom burden over the previous week; FIQR covers function, overall impact, and symptoms over seven days; the sleep methods observe one night or two weeks; and QST records evoked responses at a test encounter. This evidence does not establish the order in which pain, fatigue, disrupted sleep, cognitive difficulties, and worsening after activity unfold within one person's day. Disagreement among measurements or a single result within a normal range is not evidence that an unobserved relationship is absent. Studying actual temporal paths requires repeated, linked observations of sleep, time-stamped symptoms, activity, function, and recovery in the same people.

Keywords: fibromyalgia daily experience · fibromyalgia pain · worsening after activity · sleep measurement · fatigue · cognitive difficulties · FIQR · quantitative sensory testing

Before Telling the Story of a Day

The question “How does a day unfold?” is a question about sequence. To know whether the previous night's sleep came before morning fatigue, whether pain reduced activity or grew after activity, and when cognitive difficulties became most prominent, the same person must be observed repeatedly over time.

The evidence in this article, however, uses different time windows. The American College of Rheumatology criteria ask about painful areas and symptom burden over the previous week, while the Revised Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire (FIQR) asks about function, overall impact, and symptoms over the previous seven days. The sleep study compares one polysomnography night with two weeks of diaries and actigraphy, and quantitative sensory testing (QST) measures responses to controlled stimuli at the test encounter. [1, 2, 3, 4]

Joining these data into scenes of morning, afternoon, and night would create a narrative that was never observed. The “day” discussed here is therefore not a representative patient's timetable. It is the gap that remains between the observation windows of different measures.

The Night Before: The Same Sleep, Recorded Differently

A study of 113 adults with comorbid insomnia and fibromyalgia compared one polysomnography night with two weeks of sleep diaries and actigraphy. The three methods recorded sleep through different signals and over different time windows, and the study compared both their estimates and how well they detected change. [2]

At baseline, objective measures estimated shorter sleep-onset latency and higher total sleep time and sleep efficiency than the diaries did. Actigraphy and polysomnography also produced different estimates of sleep-onset latency and time awake after sleep onset. [2] Although all three methods measure “sleep,” they do not repeat the same observation.

Among 15 participants in the cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia group who were included in the repeated-measures analysis, diaries and actigraphy detected some changes, while polysomnography did not detect significant change. [2] This small subgroup does not establish that one method is always right. It shows only that one standardized night can diverge from nights recalled and recorded over two weeks.

Morning: Symptoms Asked Together Are Not a Timeline

The 2010 criteria recorded the number of 19 areas that had been painful over the previous week as a Widespread Pain Index (WPI) score from 0 to 19. The Symptom Severity (SS) scale combined fatigue, unrefreshing sleep, cognitive symptoms, and overall somatic symptom burden into a score from 0 to 12. [1]

This structure matters because it does not ask about pain while erasing sleep, fatigue, and cognition. Yet placing these items in the same scale does not establish a sequence or a causal chain in which disrupted sleep the night before produces morning fatigue, which then produces cognitive difficulty. [1]

A score that summarizes a week also does not show how this morning differed from the morning before. The requirement that symptoms have persisted at a similar level for at least three months is a condition for classifying persistence, not a timetable of change within a day. [1]

When Work Begins: Function Is a Different Observation

The FIQR records the impact of the previous seven days through 21 items grouped into function, overall impact, and symptoms. Its symptom domain includes pain and fatigue as well as memory, tenderness, balance, and environmental sensitivity, while its function domain records effects on daily activities separately. [3]

This distinction shows that pain intensity and difficulty with daily life are not the same question. A single seven-day summary score does not separate which task a person performed, what symptoms were present beforehand, or what changed afterward and for how long. [3]

In the validation study, the three FIQR domains correlated with their corresponding domains in the original FIQ at 0.69–0.88. [3] This supports group-level convergence between related questionnaire domains. It does not establish the cause of functional impairment, the sequence of one person's day, or the presence and duration of worsening after activity.

After Activity: The Scene the Evidence Leaves Blank

To describe worsening after activity, a study would need to link at least the type and intensity of activity, the person's pre-activity state, the time until symptoms changed, the magnitude of change, and recovery time within the same individual. The criteria, sleep comparison, FIQR validation, and QST review assembled here contain no such linked data. [1, 2, 3, 4]

This evidence therefore cannot support a representative sequence such as “pain rises first immediately after activity, followed the next day by fatigue and cognitive difficulty.” But failure to establish that sequence also cannot support the conclusion that worsening after activity does not occur. The current studies were not designed to answer that question.

FIQR provides a place to record the impact of activity and function, but a weekly score cannot reconstruct a curve of change before and after activity. [3] This gap is a limitation of measurement design, not a judgment about the credibility of patient experience.

In the Laboratory: An Evoked Response Is Not Daily Life Recreated

QST applies controlled mechanical or thermal stimuli and quantifies sensory responses. [4] It offers control over pressure or temperature, test site, and sequence, but it does not recreate the sustained demands of daily life, such as preparing for work, traveling, concentrating, or doing household tasks.

A 2025 scoping review screened 2,512 records and included 126 studies. It found that no common protocol was used consistently and that both test sites and test types varied. [4] The timing and conditions under which a response is measured are therefore part of its interpretation.

Measures such as temporal summation and conditioned pain modulation are often linked to central sensitization, but the review noted that the peripheral nervous system also contributes and that each study must define the parameters used in its analysis. [4] A single laboratory response cannot establish the cause of a day's pain, whether symptoms are genuine, or the sequence of changes after activity.

What Standardized Measures Leave Outside the Frame

Standardization fixes questions, time windows, and stimulus conditions so that comparisons can be made. The tradeoff is that part of the context falls outside the frame. A count of painful areas over the previous week does not directly show fluctuations within a day; a seven-day impact score does not show changes before and after a task; one polysomnography night does not directly show perceived changes across many nights; and a laboratory stimulus does not show the sequence of activity in daily life. [1, 2, 3, 4]

When a measurement appears to conflict with experience, the first question should not be which one is true, but what was recorded, when, and under which conditions. The sleep study found differences among methods in both their estimates and detection of change, [2] while FIQR and QST observe different targets from the outset: impact on daily life and responses to evoked stimuli. [3, 4]

The assembled evidence contains no patient interview, repeated within-day survey, or time-stamped record linking activity and symptoms. This article therefore does not present “a typical patient's day.” It says only that temporal relationships remain outside the reach of standardized scores, and limits that statement to this evidence set.

The Record Needed Before Asking for Belief

What can be said with confidence is limited. The criteria consider pain distribution together with unrefreshing sleep, fatigue, and cognitive symptoms; [1] FIQR distinguishes function from symptoms; [3] sleep methods can yield different estimates even in the same sample; [2] and QST records a separate layer of response under controlled stimulation. [4]

What cannot be said is equally clear. This evidence alone cannot establish the order in which pain, fatigue, disrupted sleep, cognitive difficulties, and changes after activity unfold within one person's day, or which change precedes another. A single test result within a normal range, or disagreement among measurements, is not evidence against a relationship that was not observed.

To study the course of an actual day, researchers would need repeated, linked observations in the same person: sleep and the state on waking, time-stamped symptoms, the type and intensity of activity, function, changes before and after activity, and recovery time. Laboratory measures could be placed on the same timeline when relevant. This is not an answer established by the current data. It is the next study design derived from the gap left by measures that were not built to answer a question about the sequence of a day. [2, 3, 4]

Declarations

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Ethics	Only public literature was used; no individual patient data or clinical intervention was involved. Any future human-participant research requires separate ethics review before it begins.

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