BACKGROUND: Interdisciplinary guidelines for the definition, classification and diagnosis of chronic widespread pain (CWP) and fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) were developed by collaboration of 10 German medical and psychological associations and 2 patient self-help organizations. METHODS: A systematic literature search was performed in the Cochrane Library (1993-12/2006), Medline (1980-2006), and Scopus (1980-12/2006). Levels of evidence were assigned according to the classification system of the Oxford Center for Evidence-Based Medicine. Grading of the strength of recommendation was done according to the German program for disease management guidelines. Standardized procedures to reach a consensus on recommendations were used. RESULTS: CWP is defined by the criteria of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR-strong consensus). FMS can be diagnosed for clinical purposes by symptom-based criteria (without tender point examination) as well as by the ACR criteria (strong consensus).