

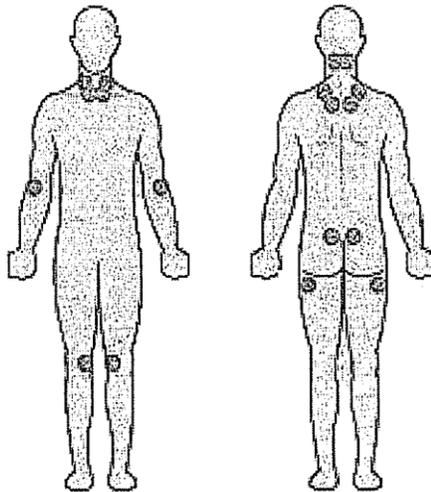
A Cure for Fibromyalgia

A young woman came to my office exhibiting all the symptoms of fibromyalgia. My patient had first sought help from a medical doctor, but was basically told, "It's all in your head," which, apparently, is not an uncommon response. In other words, these individuals are often dismissed as neurotics or hypochondriacs. The truth is that fibromyalgia syndrome is very physical. We can clearly describe the physiological changes that occur in this condition. Simply put, fibromyalgia is yet another way that the body succumbs to stress.

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

- Widespread musculoskeletal pain
- Stiffness, especially in the morning
- Persistent fatigue and/or anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive disturbances
- Insomnia or non-refreshing sleep

Symptoms may appear gradually or suddenly after a stressful episode, such as illness or trauma. Assessment is made by the presence of tenderness at eleven of eighteen specific points for a period of over three months.



Tender Points in Fibromyalgia

The cascade of events that produce pain in fibromyalgia are rather complex, but there is an underlying simplicity which can be summarized with one word: collagen.

Collagen is the Key

In fibromyalgia, the pain is due to problems with the fibrous connective tissue of the body, especially in places where it interphases with muscles and bones, as shown in the above picture.

Fibrous connective tissue is the all-purpose glue that holds everything else together. It is found abundantly in ligaments, tendons, joints, muscles, skin, internal organs, veins, and arteries.

Fibrous connective tissue is called “fibrous” because it derives its strength from countless microscopic threads made of a protein called collagen which is, by far, the most abundant protein in the body. Maintaining the integrity of our vast collagen matrix is a high priority for the body, requiring the expenditure of a lot of energy and many other nutritional resources. What does this have to do with fibromyalgia? Quite simply, in fibromyalgia, the body’s ability to maintain its collagen matrix has been compromised.

To make adequate amounts of collagen, we need proper nutrition (especially vitamin C), and the right balance of hormones. Both of these factors tend to be out of balance in the presence of chronic stress.

The situation with vitamin C is pretty straightforward. Vitamin C is needed to make collagen. Most individuals, eating the typical modern diet, don’t get nearly enough vitamin C to allow for optimal production of collagen. Furthermore, when the body is under chronic stress, vitamin C is used up more quickly, therefore, deficiency is very probable and collagen production can be seriously compromised.

The situation with hormones is more subtle. Many of the symptoms of fibromyalgia may be attributed to overproduction of stress hormones, such as cortisol, and underproduction of the restorative hormones, such as growth hormone. Cortisol triggers collagen breakdown, while growth hormone promotes collagen production.

Individuals with fibromyalgia frequently have disturbed sleep. More specifically, they do not get adequate amounts of deep restful sleep which is needed for proper tissue regeneration. This phase of sleep is characterized by an absence of dreams. It is called “delta sleep” because the brain produces an abundance of delta waves.

Delta sleep normally occurs between 10PM and 2 AM, during which the pituitary gland secretes the largest amount of growth hormone of the day. Unfortunately, individuals with fibromyalgia seem to spend less time in delta sleep, and more time in the lighter phase of sleep that is characterized by dreams – often unpleasant. According to some researchers, when healthy test subjects were deprived of delta sleep for three weeks, they developed symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Stress Begets More Stress

One factor that makes it tricky to treat fibromyalgia is that it tends to be self-perpetuating. A normal and healthy body responds to moderate levels of stress by initiating regulatory responses to restore equilibrium. However, when stress levels are high enough, they overwhelm the body’s ability to regulate itself. A vicious cycle is set up, wherein the condition perpetuates itself and increases in magnitude, like a snowball rolling down a hill. For example:

- The presence of widespread pain in fibromyalgia makes it even more difficult to get adequate delta sleep, which further impedes tissue regeneration.

- Since individuals with fibromyalgia tend to have low energy during the day (from lack of proper sleep), they often drink caffeine and use other stimulants, which tend to further raise the levels of stress hormones, and thereby worsen the condition.
- The common medication that is given for fibromyalgia – antidepressants – tend to disrupt delta sleep.
- Exercise, like deep restful sleep, promotes secretion of growth hormone. This is one reason that individuals who exercise regularly tend to heal/regenerate more readily. Furthermore, individuals who exercise regularly tend to drop down into delta sleep more easily and stay there longer. On the other hand, individuals with fibromyalgia are less likely to exercise, due to the pain and fatigue, thus exacerbating the condition.
- As years pass, degeneration continues, and eventually includes symptoms that are beyond the diagnosis of fibromyalgia. For example, chronically high cortisol levels kill brain cells, which, after many years, can show up as senile dementia. Long before that happens, the same high cortisol levels can also contribute to type-2 diabetes, thyroid issues, and osteoporosis.

Treatment

My fibromyalgia patient, described at the beginning of this article, experienced significant improvement with chiropractic care alone. Further improvement was noted with nutritional support. Specifically, my patient experienced better energy levels with the use of an omega-3 supplement, noni juice, and acai juice.

Because of the additional improvement from the nutritional support, my patient decided (with no suggestion on my part) to reduce coffee consumption. By reducing coffee and other stimulants, the body can more easily reduce the levels of stress hormones, while increasing the levels of restorative hormones. In other words, the body is “remembering” how to heal itself. The vicious cycle of ever-increasing degeneration is reversed and replaced by a positive cycle of healing and regeneration.

Below is a summary of various strategies that have been shown to be beneficial for helping individuals with fibromyalgia.

- **Exercise** promotes a number of positive changes, such as increased production of growth hormone, as well as higher levels of other hormones and brain chemicals that promote sleep, relaxation, and positive mood.
- **Massage**, in my opinion, is single most powerful therapeutic modality from reversing the physiological changes associated with stress. The massage does not have to be painfully deep. The main therapeutic effect is the touching itself. During that one hour of stillness, quiet and gentle bodywork, the sympathetic system is allowed to rest, while the parasympathetic system wakes up, allowing the many reflexes which govern the internal organs and glands to “reset” themselves. During that one hour massage, the levels of stress hormones can gently go down, so that later that same night, the body can more easily drop down into delta sleep.

- **Chiropractic**, like massage, can be helpful in restoring balance to the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, though in a different way.
- **Chiropractic and Massage.** In the case of chiropractic, the therapeutic effect has the potential of being more dramatic and rapid, because of the intimate connection between the spine and the central nervous system. For that same reason, chiropractic can also help individuals with a wide variety of other internal issues, from indigestion to cardiovascular problems. However, it would be inaccurate to say that chiropractic is “better” than massage, or vice versa, for fibromyalgia. The two modalities represent two different portals of entry by which we can help restore balance to the nervous system. One will affect the nervous system in ways that the other does not, and therefore, the two can complement each other, to produce results that might not be possible with either one acting alone.
- **Relaxing Herbs**, such as valerian, chamomile and passionflower can promote safe and restful sleep.
- **Eliminate MSG from diet.** Research indicates that removal of monosodium glutamate from the diet can greatly reduce pain from fibromyalgia. MSG overexcites the nervous system, inhibits the secretion of growth hormone, and stimulates the secretion of stress hormones. MSG is found in many packaged foods. It is commonly used in Chinese restaurants and fast-food restaurants.
- **Good Overall Nutrition.** The body needs higher levels of certain nutrients to strengthen itself during times of added stress. In particular, stress creates an increased need for omega-3 oils, B vitamins, and especially vitamin C. Ideally, these should be obtained from whole food sources.
- **Malic acid and magnesium.** Taken together in supplement form, they can help reduce the pain and fatigue associated with fibromyalgia.
- **Fruits and Vegetables** can be most helpful in a number of ways. For example, many fruits are rich in malic acid and magnesium. Fruits and vegetables are also our primary source of vitamins and minerals, in general. Furthermore, of all the food groups, fruit provides nourishment in ways that require the least of digestion and cleanup, thus allowing the body to conserve energy. The extra energy and resources can then be used to promote deeper cleansing, healing, and regeneration.
- **Vegetable Juice**, freshly made, blesses the body in a manner similar to fresh fruit. In other words, it is an excellent source energy and nutrients, in a form that requires very little digestion and cleanup.

Begin at the Beginning

Breakfast is said to be the most important meal of the day. And indeed, for individuals with fibromyalgia, eating the right kind of breakfast can go a long way in promoting full recovery. The question is, what is the proper breakfast for *you*? Here are the two main breakfast options:

- A “hearty” breakfast, featuring generous amounts of complex carbs, fats, and protein, in the form of whole grain cereal, toast with dairy butter or nut butter, eggs, etc.

- A light breakfast of easily digested fruit, vegetable juices, or a smoothie of blended vegetables and fruit.

One option is not necessarily better than the other. Each has its proper place, depending on the individual and the circumstance. The hearty breakfast is rich in calories, protein, and fat. The lighter breakfast has fewer calories, while being rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, water, and thousands of other nutrients.

In general, a hearty breakfast might be best for someone who is extremely depleted or has substantial blood sugar issues. However, when the fuel tanks have been sufficiently replenished, and blood sugar is sufficiently stabilized, a lighter breakfast of fruits and vegetables might do wonders to help the individual recover from fibromyalgia, as previously described.

As an example, a great way to start the day is with a generous helping of freshly squeezed vegetable juice, followed by fresh fruit as a midmorning snack. Can veggie juice and fresh fruit “sustain” you all morning? Yes, you simply need to consume enough of it to meet your caloric needs, so that you are not weak and famished by lunch time.

Again, you do not have to use this light-breakfast strategy every day. You can do it for as long as it produces the results you want, and then replace it with a more typical breakfast, when you feel so inclined.

In other words, I am encouraging you to use your own innate intelligence and common sense, rather than relying too much on outer authorities, to determine if you need a light breakfast or a heavy breakfast. That same innate intelligence and common sense will also tell you how much vegetable juice and fruit you need to keep body nicely fueled up on any given morning.

In addition to giving you a good start in the morning, this sort of flexibility with your breakfast can also provide an excellent opportunity to gently practice the fine art of simply trusting yourself and listening to your body. Trusting yourself and listening to your body translate into self-respect. Greater self-respect translates into deeper emotional calmness and physical relaxation which obviously will contribute to the creation of a positive spiral of healing and regeneration.