

Health Care Options for Fibromyalgia: MANAGING SYMPTOMS AND CARE WITH CHIROPRACTIC

As a musculo-skeletal condition, FM is well suited to chiropractic methods of care for management of symptoms.

Overview: Meaning fibrous (fibro), muscle (myo), and pain (algia), fibromyalgia (FM) is characterized by chronic widespread pain in the muscles, tendons, and ligaments. The pain is accompanied by fatigue and multiple places on the body where even slight pressure causes pain (called “trigger points”).

FM did not receive its own diagnostic classification until 1990, making it a newly recognized disorder. Many tests are likely to be needed to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms. In addition to tests of elimination, the current diagnostic criteria require widespread pain, fatigue and at least 11 of 18 specific trigger points. Experts still debate what constitutes a true diagnosis of FM, as these diagnostic criteria are not unique enough to prove FM. Though not life-threatening, there is currently no known cure. The best way to cope with FM is to learn to manage symptoms and adopt a healthy lifestyle. FM has been known as fibrositis, chronic muscle pain syndrome, psychogenic rheumatism, and tension myalgia.

Women of childbearing age and those with lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and ankylosing spondylitis are at greater risk of developing FM.

Symptoms:

- Widespread pain
- Fatigue and sleep disturbances
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Head and face pain
- Heightened sensitivity to touch and temperature
- Depression
- Numbness or tingling in the extremities
- “Fibro Fog” – Problems concentrating
- Mood changes
- Chest pain
- Dry eyes, skin, and/or mouth
- Menstrual cramps
- Dizziness
- Irritable bladder
- Temporomandibular joint disorder
- Restless leg syndrome
- Morning stiffness

Conditions with Similar Symptoms:

- Hypothyroidism
- Polymyalgia rheumatica
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lupus

YOUR TREATMENT

Because there are a variety of conditions that can cause symptoms that mimic fibromyalgia (FM) and because there are a number of possible reasons you may be experiencing pain, a variety of treatment options may be considered. The decision on which treatment should be used will be based on your preferences, examination findings, experience treating patients with similar conditions and the best available scientific evidence.



The January-February 2008 issue of *The Spine Journal* features “intervention review articles” that examine the research available to support various treatments of chronic low back pain. Included in the reviews is a paper on the treatment of chronic low back pain with spinal manipulation and mobilization. Spinal manipulation, often called spinal adjustment in chiropractic practice, may relieve the pressure and improve function of the joints adjusted. Mobilization involves putting the joints and soft tissues through normal range of motion in controlled stretches.

After reviewing studies that examined the effectiveness of spinal manipulative therapy (SMT) and mobilization (MOB) for chronic low back pain, researchers found that “The preponderance of the evidence for efficacy, including recent high-quality trials, and the estimated very low risk of serious AEs [adverse events] support SMT and MOB as viable options for the treatment of CLBP [chronic low back pain]. SMT and MOB are at least as effective as other efficacious and commonly used interventions.”

For those interested, the full study – as well as the reviews for other interventions for chronic low back pain – may be found at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/15299430>. (Bronfort G, et al. “Evidence-informed management of chronic low back pain with spinal manipulation and mobilization.” *The Spine Journal*. January-February 2008; Vol. 8, Iss. 1, pp. 213-225.)

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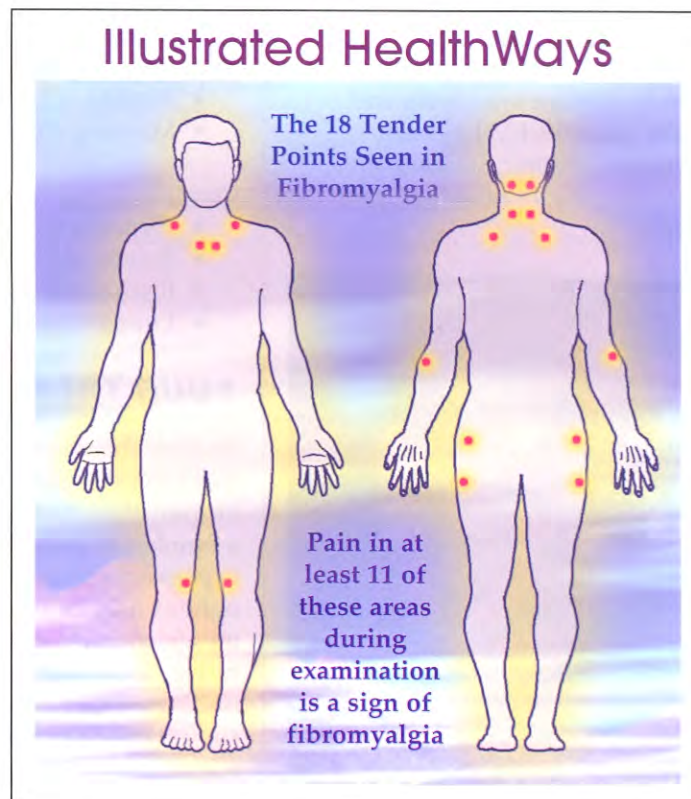
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- **EXERCISE**, including stretching and low-impact methods of exercise, have been shown to improve symptoms of fibromyalgia. Though the widespread pain of FM may make it difficult to feel motivated to exercise, persistence through the mental barriers will ultimately benefit you as you cope with symptoms. The key to exercising with FM, is to begin slowly. Appropriate exercises and methods to begin slowly will be discussed with you in the chiropractic office.

- **BEHAVIORAL THERAPIES** are intended to improve your coping skills. Because there is currently no known cure for fibromyalgia, changing your beliefs about the condition can make managing symptoms easier. With the necessary skills, you can learn to recognize your limitations and work within them.
- **CHIROPRACTIC** care of fibromyalgia focuses on relieving musculoskeletal symptoms using methods such as chiropractic adjustments to spinal or other joints. As a musculoskeletal condition, FM is well-suited to chiropractic methods of care for management of symptoms.



- **ACUPUNCTURE** involves the insertion of very fine needles into the skin at points determined based on the condition being treated. An average of 5 to 15 needles are used in each treatment. Acupuncture has been used for centuries and the theory behind it is that the needles can correct and improve the body’s flow of energy (called Chi). In addition to the needles, forms of acupuncture can incorporate pressure, electric currents, laser, or heat.
- **SPA THERAPIES** include massage, Turkish baths, hot packs, whirlpools, and other methods that relax the body and relieve stress.

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- **NUTRACEUTICALS** are thought to counteract stress, rid the body of toxins, and restore depleted vitamins and minerals. In addition to recommended supplements, there may also be recommended dietary changes as part of treatment for fibromyalgia. For example, those with FM are often urged to avoid caffeine, sugar, and alcohol intake. Depending on your particular case and your specific needs, additional and more personalized recommendations are likely to be made.

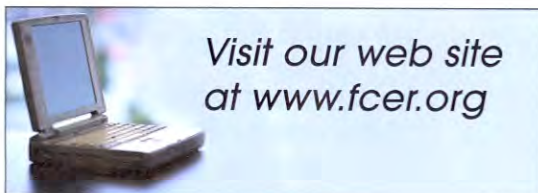
YOUR ALTERNATIVES

Your condition may be best treated using both chiropractic treatments and other treatment from additional healthcare professionals. If your condition requires it, a direct referral for treatment may be made to medical, surgical or other healthcare providers.

- **ANTI-DEPRESSANTS** are often prescribed for fibromyalgia. There are several types of antidepressants and the prescribing doctor will work with you to determine which type would be most effective for you. Antidepressants are usually prescribed to improve mood disorders by changing brain chemistry. They are sometimes prescribed for FM because some of the changes in brain chemistry may affect pain sensitivity and fatigue. Antidepressants for FM are typically prescribed in lower doses than for depression. If you choose to receive medication for the management of fibromyalgia, ask your prescribing doctor or pharmacist about what to expect and what side effects to watch for.

Prevention:

- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep
- Reduce stress
- Eat well and take supplements for good nutrition
- Avoid negative factors such as smoking and excessive alcohol



Five Steps to Reduce Stroke Risk

Studies have already suggested that a “low risk” lifestyle can reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer but now new research suggests that this lifestyle may also reduce the risk of stroke. A “low risk” lifestyle is one that incorporates five healthy factors: not smoking; maintaining a healthy weight; exercising 30 or more minutes each day; taking a multivitamin; drinking alcohol in moderation; and eating a healthy diet, with an emphasis on fruits and vegetables, chicken and fish, nuts, legumes, and low amounts of trans and saturated fats. In a large study, 43,685 men with an average age of 54 and 71,243 women with an average age of 50 were studied for up to eight years. Researchers found that women who followed all five of the healthy lifestyles had a 79% lower risk of all types of stroke and an 81% lower risk of ischemic stroke, the most common type of stroke. For men, those who followed the five healthy choices, there was a 69% lower risk of all strokes and an 80% lower risk of ischemic stroke. The study was published in the journal *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*. (Reuters. August 11, 2008.)

Physical Activity May Slow Alzheimer's Disease, Prevent Falls, and Improve QOL

When researchers compared the fitness levels and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans of 56 healthy individuals and 60 adults (over the age of 60) who had early Alzheimer's disease, they found that exercise appears to slow shrinkage in the brain of the Alzheimer's patients that is associated with memory. “This is the first study to get an inside look specifically where these changes occur in the brain,” said Robyn Honea, the principal investigator in the study. “We're able to locate the changes associated with fitness to the actual memory region, the hippocampus, which is a key area for Alzheimer's-related atrophy.” In another study, conducted in Australia, people with dementia who were directed to exercise for 12 months by their caregivers, had fewer falls and improved quality of life (QOL). Both of these studies were presented at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease in Chicago. (Reuters. July 27, 2008.)

Prevent Dehydration

Though people may consider dehydration just a concern in hot weather, it is also a potential problem associated with stomach bugs and a failure to drink enough water. Dehydration is a serious condition with symptoms such as an inability to produce tears, sunken eyes, little or no urine output for 8 or more hours, rapid heartbeat, listlessness, and dry skin, eyes, or mouth.

To avoid dehydration, drink plenty of fluids, especially water each day – and increase the amount if exercising or sweating. The sick, elderly, and children need to be monitored to prevent dehydration, especially if they are vomiting, have diarrhea, or have a fever. (HealthDay News. July 28, 2008.)

Q: Why don't all chiropractors give the same treatments?

A Chiropractic is the branch of health care that concerns itself with structure (primarily of the spine) and function (primarily of the nervous system) and how optimizing those relationships affect the restoration and preservation of health. Because spinal and nervous system function are so complex, they can be assessed in many ways. Chiropractic is both a science and an art and your Doctor of Chiropractic will care for you in an individualized approach that matches his or her unique qualifications and talents with your unique condition, characteristics, lifestyle, and desires. Not only are there variances in both your doctor's training and your condition, but there are also many different causes of problems that can manifest with similar symptoms. For example, there are over 200 causes of headaches. The type of headaches and their origins vary greatly, to the point that two people with the same type of headache can have different causes that need different methods of treatment.

Even though the way in which the human body functions has not changed much in the last 100 years, our understanding of it has, and an enormous, ever increasing amount of information is amassing in chiropractic and related fields. The Doctor of Chiropractic must choose how to learn and apply as much information and technology as possible and will study information based on his or her own background, training, talents, and previous successes. You gain from this unique qualification by how your DC applies his or her knowledge and practical experience to your unique circumstances.

In recent history, Doctors of Chiropractic have begun to specialize in key areas of service to patients, such as nutrition, sports injuries, orthopedics, occupational health, neurology, rehabilitation, internal disorders, general practice, and more. No matter what methods are used by your chiropractor, the intention is the same – to identify and correct your conditions, your health concerns and prevent them from coming back so that you can live a better life.

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