

Fibromyalgia Demystified

Bodywork as a Key Therapy

Cathy Ulrich

Jane had just been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. She was happy to have a name for the mysterious, traveling pain she had felt for some time, but she was still worried about how to deal with it. She'd done research on the Internet, but the information left her more confused. "There are so many causes and ways to treat it," she said. "I don't know what to do." A friend of Jane's recommended massage as part of her treatment plan. "She said it helped her," Jane said, "so I'm willing to try."

For fibromyalgia sufferers, muscle pain, tightness, and general body discomfort can all too often become a way of life. But what is fibromyalgia, and what can be done to help?

Theories about the cause of fibromyalgia include thyroid imbalance, sleep disorders, genetic predisposition, allergies, trauma--especially whiplash injuries--and possibly even viruses. Many who have fibromyalgia syndrome have other conditions as well, including depression, irritable bowel syndrome, chemical sensitivities, intolerance to exercise, restless legs syndrome, extreme sensitivity to cold, and seasonal affective disorder.

Factors At Play

Jay Goldstein, MD, a leading researcher and clinician, identified three common factors in people who are susceptible to fibromyalgia. It's helpful to consider

*Everything you
do can be done
better from a
place of
Relaxation.*

-Stephen C. Paul



Bodywork can ease the pain of fibromyalgia, helping people improve their quality of life.

What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia, which literally means "connective tissue muscle pain," causes severe tenderness in multiple points throughout the body as well as persistent fatigue, morning stiffness, and non-refreshing sleep. Fibromyalgia is found in about 2 percent of the adult population, and women are five to seven times more likely to have it than men.

these factors when planning a treatment approach:

1. Biochemical factors, such as hormonal disturbances, allergies, frequent colds and viruses, and nutritional deficiencies.
2. Biomechanical factors, such as

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congenital deformities (one leg longer than the other or scoliosis, curvature of the spine) or functional conditions (poor posture, overuse syndromes, or poor breathing patterns).

3. Psychosocial factors, like depression, anxiety, or difficulty coping with stress.

Bodywork Can Help

Fibromyalgia is best treated using a multidisciplinary approach, and bodywork can be a key part of healing, recovery, and management. Depending on your specific needs, any or all of the following methods may be helpful.

Swedish Massage

Because stress is such a strong component of fibromyalgia, regular massages for relaxation and stress reduction can be beneficial to your program. Swedish massage is the foundation of training for most massage therapists. Its primary goals are to gently relieve muscle tension, improve circulation, and restore the balance between mind and body.

Rolfing

This whole-body approach is designed to restore postural alignment and ease. Rolfing--and other related forms of bodywork under the umbrella of structural integration--helps to free soft tissue tightness and remove the structural imbalances that create stresses and strains on the body, restoring biomechanical function. Whiplash and other types of neck injuries are commonly seen in fibromyalgia cases. Rolfing aligns the body so the head and neck can rest more easily.

Lymphatic Massage

The lymph system is the body's primary way of eliminating waste at the cellular level. When the lymph system is backed up, tissues can get bogged down and become irritated, inflamed, and swollen. Biochemical disturbances are a key factor in fibromyalgia, so restoring the mechanical function of the lymph system can be important. Lymphatic massage is a specific form of therapy designed to improve circulation, remove waste, and reduce swelling in the tissues. It's often a good way to start a bodywork session.

Neuromuscular Therapy

Trigger points--pivotal body points that

hold and release pressure--become small areas of extreme tenderness and tightness for fibromyalgia patients. Neuromuscular therapy is a specific form of bodywork designed to free these trigger points along with the fiber in the surrounding tissues. Neuromuscular therapy encompasses many different techniques, but the system is designed to relieve the tightness in the deep soft tissues and to eliminate trigger points.

Considerations

Sensitivity to touch varies greatly for fibromyalgia patients. Some people prefer very deep work, while others are sensitive to the lightest pressure. It's important that you establish good communications with your massage therapist so you can explain what feels comfortable to you and what doesn't.

When you're in an acute flare-up, limit your bodywork to more gentle

techniques. When you're feeling better, deeper work intended to eliminate trigger points or work on posture may be more appropriate. Partner with your therapist to find the best approach.

You may be sore after a session. A moderate level of soreness can be expected, but should only last about forty-eight hours as your body adapts to the changes. If it lasts longer or is more severe, bodywork may be too aggressive or the session may be too long. Start out slowly, learn what works best for you, and let your therapist increase the time or intensity as you progress.

Fibromyalgia is a soft tissue condition, and bodyworkers are experts at working with soft tissues. By including massage in your care, you can expect to manage and improve your fibromyalgia.



Free yourself from the often debilitating discomfort of fibromyalgia and take back your life.

Healthy Energy Boosters

Tips to Staying Energized and Alert

Rebecca Jones

Here are some tips for keeping your energy levels up.

Snack Smart

Strategic snacking can be a good way to smooth out dips in your energy level and avoid hunger cravings that can lead you to overeat. Go ahead and snack---just be as choosy in your snack selection as you are in meal planning.

Grab an Energy Bar

Don't fall for the fiction that all so-called "energy bars" are unpalatable but good for you. A lot of energy bars are filled with chemicals and with sugar, so read labels, and look for high fiber, high protein, and limited carbs.

Pick-Me-Up Snacks

Nuts such as almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, and hazelnuts are among the best choices for healthy, pick-me-up snacks, nutritionists say.

Stay Hydrated

Even slight dehydration can leave you

tired and lethargic. The answer is, of course, to drink plenty of water. If the taste of plain water doesn't excite you, consider some of the flavored varieties, keeping in mind that loads of extra sugar should be avoided.

Get Your Beauty Sleep

The number one myth about sleep is that you can get by on six hours a night, but the further away you deviate from getting eight hours sleep a night---and some people get too much, not too little---the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity, and a host of other maladies.

Avoid Caffeine, Get to Sleep

Caffeine is a great pick-me-up first thing in the morning, but it has a six- to seven-hour "half-life," meaning that half the caffeine in that cup of coffee you consumed to ward off the 3:00 p.m. doldrums will still be lingering in your bloodstream after the 10:00 p.m. news.

Rebecca Jones is a Denver-based freelance writer.



Stay hydrated to keep energy up.

The Scoop on Meditation

A Simple Practice with Profound Benefits

People who meditate regularly appear internally and externally five to 10 years younger than their non-meditating peers, according to author Deepak Chopra. That's good news for the estimated 10 million people who practice meditation on an ongoing basis and experience the resulting calm it cultivates.

The rich benefits come from doing something that looks like nothing: Sitting still, being quiet, and breathing deeply. Meditation works simply but profoundly by defusing the onslaughts of life - a racing mind, busyness, deadlines, commutes, all of which have physiological effects on well-being. Meditation calms the nervous system, decreases metabolic rate, heart rate, and blood pressure, and lowers levels of cholesterol, stress hormones, and free

radicals. It also has a direct effect on breathing, slowing and deepening respiration so more oxygen circulates throughout the body. Not only that, meditation is said to lessen feelings of anxiety and depression and improve memory and concentration. And all of this culminates in slowing the aging process, as Chopra notes.

There are many meditation techniques, including focusing on a mantra, a sacred word or phrase, or your breath. But the basic intent of all meditation is focus and attention. And it doesn't take hours a day in an ashram to meditate effectively. Benefits kick in with even a short period of devoted time.

How to begin? Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothes, sit on a cushion or chair with your back straight (think once

again, comfort), rest your hands on your legs, let your eyes go soft and out of focus or close them, breathe slowly and deeply, and - the hardest part - attempt to empty your mind of thoughts and quiet the internal dialogue. When thoughts flit through your mind, let them pass without judging them and come back to your focus (your mantra, counting, etc.) and breathing.

Start with this sitting meditation technique for five minutes a day, and add on time as you get more at ease with the process. For more information on techniques and benefits, check out www.abc-of-meditation.com.

The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.

-Helen Keller

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