



FIBROMYALGIA ...

A Widely Misunderstood Syndrome

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One of the most mysterious and perplexing disorders for healthcare providers is Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FS). It is a disorder characterized by widespread pain, multiple tender points, stiffness, fatigue, sleep disturbances, emotional distress, and a multitude of other possible complaints. It is reported that as many as **2% or six million people in the United States suffer from the disease**, the majority of whom are women of childbearing age. To date there is no definitive known cause or cure for Fibromyalgia, and no two people are affected in exactly the same way. This newsletter addresses the criteria as to which persons are diagnosed with FS, as well as suspected nutritional causes, and aspects of comprehensive treatment.

In 1990 the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) developed specific criteria for classifying Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FS). The classification is as follows:

- I. History of **widespread pain for at least 3 months**. A requirement of pain on both sides of the body, as well as above and below the waist is needed to be considered "widespread".
- II. Pain which is axial (**neck, mid-back, lower back, and/or chest**).
- III. Pain in at least **11 of 18 tender points** located throughout the body (see chart)

Although concise, the FS classification fails to address many questions surrounding the disorder. For example, British and American research has found that as many as 20% of the population suffers from 'widespread' pain which matches the ACR definition. Additionally, this definition fails to account for non-pain symptoms which are often present in the FS patient. These include, but are not limited to; **disturbed sleep, fatigue, morning stiffness, depression, headaches, tender lymph nodes, bowel or bladder disturbances, sensitivity to cold or heat, anxiety, gastrointestinal disturbances, dizziness, heart palpitations, and environmental allergies**. Third, FS can be labeled primary (where no other cause can be found) or secondary, in which another issue has caused FS. For example, FS has been linked to physical trauma, leaky gut syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, and as many as 46 different types of infections. In the end, a diagnosis of FS is often made only after everything else has been ruled out.

Nutrition's Link to Fibromyalgia Syndrome

Many studies have shown that what someone eats, and

which supplements someone takes, can have a tremendous impact on the symptoms of FS. For example, a study performed two years ago found that changing to a **raw-food vegan diet** consisting of fruits; vegetables; legumes; cereals; nuts; and seeds lead to 1) improved sleep, 2) less joint pain, 3) weight loss, and 4) increased feeling of well-being. Other similar studies have consistently demonstrated a decrease in pain, morning stiffness, depression, and use of pain killers.

One theory behind nutrition's role in FS, is the effect grains have on our body. Dr. David Seamen in his book *Clinical Nutrition for Pain, Inflammation and tissue healing* lists five reasons why **grains have an adverse effect on our body**. First, grains

have an imbalance in essential fats, meaning there is more omega-6 (which are inflammatory) than omega-3 (which are anti-inflammatory). Studies have determined that there is an **inflammatory component of FS** and is one reason anti-inflammatory medication is often prescribed. Second, grains contain a substance called Gliadin, and many peoples' bodies react to Gliadin as if it were a foreign substance. The body then forms antibodies which attack the Gliadin and cause a mild autoimmune reaction. **Fibromyalgia is often classified as an autoimmune disorder**. A study of 200 random subjects found that those with the highest levels of Gliadin had increased headaches, fatigue, and diarrhea. The third detrimental component of grains is Lectin.

Adapted from the Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research's Pamphlet on Fibromyalgia Syndrome.

Lectin is a protein which is found in grains which has been shown to **damage the lining of the gut**. This allows larger than normal molecules to cross through, causing chemical autoimmune reaction, inflammation, and interference with normal gut functioning. Coincidentally, many studies have shown that patients with functional gastrointestinal disorders, such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) often suffer from Fibromyalgia Syndrome. **One study in particular found that 70% of FS patients had IBS**. Lectins also stimulate the production of chemical factors which cause flu-like symptoms. Fourth, grains contain phytates, which are substances that bind to essential minerals which prevents them from being absorbed into our body. Numerous studies link depleted minerals with FS. Lastly, grains have an acidic pH which has been shown to cause pain and inflammation.

Are grains the only food that is damaging to our body?

Certainly not! Saturated fat found in many of the fast food products we eat are equally as detrimental. Red meat has something called arachadonic acid which has also been found to increase inflammatory chemicals and cause damage. An increase in caffeine can have negative effects as well. The vegan diet is very low in grains like refined pasta, rice and breads, and there is no red meat. This is the likely reason why the diet was so successful for those with FS.

Treatment of Fibromyalgia Syndrome.

Since no two cases of FS are exactly alike, treatment will vary, and must address individual factors which may contribute to the disorder. The following is a list of treatments which are most often recommended for Fibromyalgia Syndrome.

Chiropractic Treatment

Classification of FS includes multiple tender areas throughout the body as well as axial (spinal or chest) pain. **A chiropractor is trained to examine and correct spinal problems which create these symptoms.** Additionally, chiropractors are trained and use different techniques to reduce muscle spasm, pain, and adhesions associated with the many tender points of FS.

Nutritional management

As illustrated in many studies, modification of diet can have a dramatic affect on FS. This modification should include the **reduction, if not elimination, of refined grains such as pasta, rice, bread, wheat flour, and the reduction in red meat.** This will reduce the body's level of inflammatory chemicals which are increased in FS. Replacing them with increased fruits, vegetables, nuts, and fatty fish like salmon will reduce inflammation. Dr. Seaman recommends adding anti-inflammatory spices to the diet such as ginger, turmeric, cumin, and boswellia. These spices can typically be found in health food stores.

Vitamins and Supplements

Many of today's diets are devoid of the amounts of nutrients our bodies need to function properly. Therefore, we must supplement them with certain vitamins and minerals. It is recommended that **the average person should supplement their diet with a high quality source of multiple vitamin, magnesium, Coenzyme Q10, and Omega 3 fatty acids** (found as EPA/DHA or Fish Oil). Those with Fibromyalgia may benefit from adding such vitamins as B-complex, Lipoic acid, and ginseng. Several studies have shown that a supplement 5-HTP may be effective at reducing depression, anxiety, insomnia and body pains associated with FS. 5-HTP is involved in the synthesis of serotonin in the brain, which elevates mood and modulates pain. **NOTE:** anyone taking antidepressant medication should **NOT** take 5-HTP as there may be an interaction. Another important supplement is SAME which functions to help reduce inflammation and

pain, as well as depression. Melatonin has also shown some benefit to FS sufferers. One study reported that patients with FS had nighttime melatonin levels 31% lower than normal, which may contribute to impaired sleep, fatigue, and altered pain perception associated with FS.

Exercise

Nearly every article which discusses comprehensive FS treatment discusses the necessity of exercise. Often considered counterintuitive for someone who is constantly tired and achy, gentle daily aerobic exercise such as walking, bicycling, or swimming has shown tremendous benefit for those with FS. Gentle daily exercise will **increase the body's level of endorphins**, which are natural pain killers.

Cognitive Therapy

FS sufferers often have accompanying anxiety and/or depression. In the past, some attributed the entire gamut of physical symptoms as psychosomatic/psychosocial illness. However, **the**

majority in the health profession now attribute anxiety and depression as a result, rather than a cause, of the pain and disability. Regardless, those with FS will benefit from addressing this aspect of their life by speaking with a psychologist, social worker, or other mental healthcare professional.

Conclusion

There is no way to get around the fact that Fibromyalgia is difficult... difficult to diagnose and difficult to treat. As doctors of chiropractic, we have been trained to recognize and diagnose Fibromyalgia Syndrome, treat the associated pain and disability, and council on nutritional, supplement, and exercise recommendations as needed. Like any syndrome or injury, cooperation with other healthcare providers may be necessary as well.

A patient can achieve a great deal of relief following this newsletter's recommendations, but they must be extremely motivated to do so. It is not easy to change one's diet, let alone reduce or eliminate something such as grains, which are a dominant part of our society's lifestyle. Needed vitamins and supplements can get expensive, and we all know how hard it is to start an exercise program. Regardless, someone with Fibromyalgia must make a firm decision that they are ready to make major life changes in order to help themselves. Approaching any of the treatment components half-heartedly will rarely make a difference, and may leave someone who is used to being frustrated, even more so.

For more information on Fibromyalgia Syndrome; it's causes, diagnosis, or treatment, call The Cox Chiropractic clinic at (434) 293-6165.

<p align="center">Fibromyalgia Treatment Recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chiropractic spinal evaluation and treatment 2. Nutritional evaluation and management 3. Vitamins and supplements 4. Exercise 5. Cognitive therapy
