Natural Relief for Fibromyalgia

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Living with chronic pain can be debilitating and impact every area of your life. Those suffering with Fibromyalgia know this all too well.

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a condition where there is chronic, widespread pain with no evident cause, which has been present for over three months. The individual feels pain and tenderness throughout the body. Even just a small amount of pressure can cause a tremendous amount of pain.

There are more than 5 million people in America affected by FM. Although mostly women have Fibromyalgia, about 10% of those diagnosed are men. It is believed that women experience FM more than men because estrogen reduces the pain threshold. Often, people begin to experience symptoms when they reach middle age, but the onset can also be earlier. Those who suffer can experience severe pain in their muscles, tendons and soft tissues. Fibromyalgia has been referred to as "arthritis in your muscles."

Along with the widespread pain, there are several other potential symptoms, including:

Fatigue

Muscle tightness

Morning stiffness

Insomnia

Depression

Anxiety

Headaches

Concentration/Memory problems or "brain fog"

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Gastrointestinal bloating

Diagnosing FM can be challenging because there are many conditions that cause widespread pain, and the pain of FM is not always consistent from patient to patient. Pain can occur all over the body, but it might also be felt in only one or two areas, particularly the neck and shoulders. There are no simple tests to diagnose FM. Although there is a blood test called FM/a, most experts don't recommend it due to lack of scientific evidence to support its use. Typically a doctor will test tender points at specific points on the body. Having 11 tender points out of the 18 points can help lead to a diagnosis of FM. There are pain indexes and scales to help determine the number of painful areas, as well as the severity of symptoms.

The cause of FM is not clear. Some believe it to be a systemic autoimmune disease with viral, bacterial and fungal infections contributing to the condition. Disruption of the bacterial flora, deficiencies in certain vitamins and minerals (especially vitamin B1, vitamin D and magnesium), lack of exercise, hormone disruption and food sensitivities are often associated with fibromyalgia. Traumas, such as car accidents, and emotional stress can trigger it. According to Dr. Muhammad Yunus at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, FM is a disease where there is an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. People with fibromyalgia produce more of the neurotransmitter called “substance P” that signals pain and less of the neurotransmitter seratonin that reduces pain. Seratonin is produced in the gut. When the gut is weakened from an imbalance of the bacterial flora or inflamed from food sensitivities, seratonin levels are decreased.

Dr. Peter Osborne, with the Gluten Free Society, has found food sensitivities to gluten, dairy and sugar are often at the root of FM symptoms. In an article "Gluten Sensitivity-A Potential Cause for Fibromyalgia," Dr. Osborne discussed recent research published in the April 2014 issue of *Rheumatology International* showing a strong connection between non-celiac gluten patients and FM. When gluten was removed from the diet, patients experienced "reduced pain, improved ability to work and perform daily activities, as well as a reduced need for pain medications."

If you suspect that you have FM, you will want to be assessed for other possible causes of your pain such as anemia, hypothyroid, Lyme, hormonal imbalances and food sensitivities. Despite the confusion regarding FM and its root cause, the pain is very real and not "all in your head."

The following steps may help you in recovering from FM without drugs and restore your quality of life.

1. Avoid common inflammatory foods, including gluten, dairy, sugar, artificial sweeteners, soy, corn, peanuts and eggs.
2. Drink plenty of quality water. Most people are dehydrated, which can lead to aches, pains and stiffness. Stay away from caffeine, as well as juices.
3. Get to bed by 10 p.m., and try to get 7-8 hours of sleep daily. This can be a challenge at first, especially if you are a night owl.
4. Reduce your weight if you are overweight. A recent study showed those who are overweight have a higher risk for FM.
5. Supplement with magnesium (300-600mg), vitamin B and make sure your vitamin D level is in a healthy range (50-90).
6. Check your hormone levels. Saliva testing can show hormone levels differently than blood work and detect hormone overload that may not show up in the blood test.
7. Determine if you have mercury or lead toxicity. This can be done through a Hair Tissue Mineral Analysis.
8. Improve your gut health by eating fermented foods, such as sauerkraut, kimchi and plain yogurt, and take a quality probiotic.
9. Get some exercise each day to help with the elimination of toxins and to improve circulation. Don't push too hard. Keep it gentle in the beginning and slowly build up. A traditional gym-based or aerobic exercise program may exacerbate fibromyalgia symptoms. Instead, yoga, Pilates, or tai chi—which offer mild stretching, relaxation, and breathing techniques—may work better than vigorous exercise.
10. Take a good quality fish oil to help reduce inflammation.
11. Chiropractic care has consistently ranked as one of the therapeutic approaches that offer the most relief for the fibromyalgia. A 1985 study of 81 FM patients found chiropractic care far superior to drugs. Another study found after just 15 chiropractic treatments, FM patients had significantly less pain, fatigue and improved sleep quality. Applied kinesiology, a specialization within chiropractic, has also been shown to be very helpful in treating fibromyalgia.