

Pain Relief from Fibromyalgia

By Igor Zielinski

Chronic and widespread muscle pain and tenderness is medically classified as fibromyalgia. What exactly does it mean? Widespread means that the pain is in all four quadrants of the body and chronic means pain duration is 3 months or more. Diagnosis is established based on symptoms and physical findings. A physician checks 18 designated points for tenderness; and, pain in 11 of them confirms the diagnosis.

There are no tests for fibromyalgia. No blood test, x ray, CT scan, etc. is useful to make a diagnosis. Because there are other disorders that have a similar presentation of symptoms, it is important to contact your physician to perform some tests that allow differentiation of FM from hypothyroidism and/or other rheumatic diseases.

This is just the beginning. Pain is the main symptom, but not the only symptom. It is often accompanied by fatigue, insomnia, headaches, restless legs syndrome (RLS), poor memory, lack of concentration, numbness, and depression.

There is no cure for fibromyalgia and it is managed as a chronic condition. The FDA has approved milnacipran (*Savella*) as the main drug for FM. Other drugs are used, too, and they alter brain biochemistry (serotonin and norepinephrine) to raise the pain threshold. Some patients use pain killers on a daily basis. The list of the side effects of these medicines consists of (but is not limited to): nausea, dizziness, constipation, insomnia, headaches.

FM is a perfect example of the effectiveness of Chinese medicine. Why? Chinese medicine diagnoses pattern not only single symptoms. Pain is just one of those symptoms, but to establish a diagnosis, we need to take into consideration other coexisting problems. Populations of patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia would receive at least three different diagnoses in Chinese medicine. That also means that there would be different treatment methods. Patients with different symptoms often require different treatments.

In practice it means that a patient with fibromyalgia and insomnia will be treated differently than a fibromyalgia patient with fatigue. A Chinese medicine practitioner assimilates all the symptoms together and treats them as a pattern. Therapeutic actions include acupuncture, usage of herbs, change of diet, an exercise program, and lifestyle changes. It sounds complex, but it has advantages over a pharmacological approach because it is effective and safe and has no side effects.

Equally important to note, however, is the necessity to research and do your homework to find a reputable *licensed* acupuncturist. He/she must practice in a sterile environment and use clean needle techniques and disposable and individually packaged needles. Make sure that he/she has completed a clean needle technique class and exam and has many hours of course work concerning needling technique and safety. Additionally, there should be hundreds of hours of observation and practice with insertion and removal of needles during internships with licensed acupuncture university staff.

Failure to do so could mean perilous consequences and health diseases by unscrupulous and unlicensed acupuncturists reusing tainted and dirty needles. The time invested to research a reputable acupuncturist will be time well spent enabling you to finally experience freedom from the chronic pain of fibromyalgia.

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