



ASHEVILLE INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

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Proof That Fibromyalgia is Real (November 2008)

Researchers have detected abnormalities in the brains of people with fibromyalgia, a chronic condition whose symptoms include muscle pain and fatigue.

Some researchers have suggested that the pain of fibromyalgia is the result of depression, but the new study suggests otherwise. The abnormalities were independent of anxiety and depression levels.

Researchers evaluated 20 women diagnosed with fibromyalgia and 10 healthy women without the condition who served as a control group. The researchers performed brain imaging called single photon emission computed tomography, or SPECT.

The imaging showed that women with the syndrome had "brain perfusion" -- blood flow abnormalities in their brains. The abnormalities were directly correlated with the severity of disease symptoms.

An increase in blood flow was found in the brain region known to discriminate pain intensity.

Sources: Washington Post November 3, 2008 , Journal of Nuclear Medicine November 2008 Vol. 49 No. 11 1798-1803

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

It's estimated that 2 percent to 4 percent of the U.S. population has fibromyalgia, and nine out of 10 are women. As more research like the study above comes out, it should put to rest the controversy over whether or not fibromyalgia is "real."

And, yes, fibromyalgia is a real, sometimes debilitating illness. People who suffer from it often report pain all over their bodies -- including in their muscles, ligaments and tendons -- along with a feeling of exhaustion. There are also typically "tender points," or places on your body where even a slight pressure causes serious pain.

Physical Proof of Fibromyalgia - The causes of fibromyalgia are still unknown, although some experts, such as Dr. Frederick Wolfe, the director of the National Databank for Rheumatic Diseases and the lead author of the 1990 paper that first defined fibromyalgia's diagnostic guidelines, believe fibromyalgia is mainly a physical response to mental and emotional stress, depression, and anxiety about economic and social issues.

I would have to agree with his assertion, as nearly every person I have seen with fibromyalgia has suffered from an underlying emotional component.

This does NOT mean that fibromyalgia is "all in your head." As the study above showed, SPECT imaging found that women with fibromyalgia had blood flow abnormalities in their brains. Specifically, an increase in blood flow was found in the brain region known to discriminate pain intensity.

A similar study conducted several years ago had nearly identical results. In it fibromyalgia patients underwent a type of detailed brain scan known as functional magnetic resonance

imaging (fMRI) while an instrument intermittently applied different levels of pressure to their left thumbnail.

When all study participants received the same level of mild pressure, blood flow increased much more in the brains of patients with fibromyalgia than among those in the control group. As in the more recent study, the increased blood flow -- which is a "surrogate measure" for nerve activity - - occurred in areas of the brain known to be associated with pain.

In addition, when study participants were subjected to different levels of pressure, fibromyalgia patients reported pain at half the level of pressure that caused the same feelings of pain among the healthy controls. So something appears to be awry with the way the central nervous system processes painful stimuli in fibromyalgia patients.

A Brief Warning About Lyrica - The pain of fibromyalgia can be severe, and most people do not respond to conventional painkillers. So it's easy to see why there was such fanfare when the FDA approved Lyrica, the first medicine approved to treat fibromyalgia pain.

Lyrica is a drug originally designed for diabetic nerve pain that was rejected because of its unimpressive results and many side effects, including weight gain, edema, dizziness and sleepiness.

One of the primary concerns surrounding Lyrica is the tendency for this drug to cause substantial weight gain, especially considering that many fibromyalgia patients are already overweight. In three-month trials of the drug, 9 percent of patients had a weight gain of more than 7 percent, and their weight kept rising steadily over time.

And, as you may already suspect, this is a steep risk, considering that fibromyalgia cannot be cured with a pill.

Easing Fibromyalgia Pain and Symptoms the Natural Way -

A natural treatment program for fibromyalgia should involve a three-pronged approach:

1. Emotional Repair - Bioenergetic normalization of previous emotional traumas is the single most effective treatment I know of for fibromyalgia at this time.

There are many different techniques that can be used here, but the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is still my favorite. EFT is a procedure that borrows from the much-heralded discoveries of Albert Einstein (everything, including your body, is composed of energy) AND from the ancient wisdom of Chinese acupuncture.

For a look at the sometimes spectacular results EFT has with Fibromyalgia read this article from the EFT Web site – "Fibromyalgia Patient—"I forgot what pain is all about."

In essence, EFT is an emotional version of acupuncture except that needles are not involved. Instead, certain release points are stimulated by tapping them with your fingertips. Further, the basics of EFT can be learned by anyone and can be self-applied (usually in minutes).

2. Dietary Changes - People with fibromyalgia may experience reductions in their symptoms by eliminating one or more foods from their diet, including:

- Corn
- Wheat
- Dairy
- Citrus
- Soy
- Nuts

Following my [nutrition plan](#), including identifying your [nutritional type](#), will help you in eliminating these foods. One study showed that nearly half of the patients reported “significant reduction of pain” after two weeks without eating any of the potential food allergens, and more than 75 percent reported a reduction of other symptoms such as headache, fatigue and bloating.

3. Exercise - People suffering from fibromyalgia pain tend to shy away from exercise, and understandably so. However, research shows that a combination of aerobic activity and strength training can improve fibromyalgia symptoms.

In one [study by Harvard researchers](#), after exercising for 20 weeks, women with this condition reported improved muscle strength and endurance, and lessening of their symptoms including pain, stiffness, fatigue and depression.

If you or someone you love has fibromyalgia, I highly recommend working with an exercise specialist who can teach you exercises that will safely facilitate your healing process.

Finally, as you work to normalize your emotional traumas the following therapies can further help to reduce pain and get you back on track to optimal health:

- **Neurostructural Integration Technique (NST)** -- NST is a series of gentle massage-like techniques that have profound and amazing muscle normalization effects. Unlike massage, or most manipulation or adjustments, the benefits seem to be long lasting; generally 3-10 minute sessions are all it takes for permanent relief -- assuming you have addressed problem foods and previous emotional traumas.

You can go to our NST therapist page to [find a therapist close to you](#).

- **Chiropractic Care** -- Especially the disciplines in chiropractic that address the emotional components, like TBM, NET and BEST. Dr. Kent provides some excellent recommendations on [how to locate a good chiropractor](#) if you don't currently know of one.

- **Acupuncture** -- Western studies have shown that the use of acupuncture on pain-relief points cuts the blood flow to key areas of your brain within seconds, which may explain how this ancient technique might help relieve pain. It's also been suggested that acupuncture may help support the activity of your body's natural pain-killing chemicals, and studies have found it to provide [relief from fibromyalgia pain for up to 16 weeks](#).