

OH MY ACHING BODY! Fighting Fibromyalgia

IF YOU ARE among the estimated three to six million people in Canada and the United States suffering from fibromyalgia, you can stop suffering. A holistic and natural approach to this painful disorder can help you reverse chronic pain and fatigue.

Originally termed "fibrositis," fibromyalgia is a prevalent type of rheumatism. Doctors classify fibromyalgia as a "syndrome," which means that it is a collection of seemingly unconnected symptoms with the main one being unaccountable pain ("myo" means muscle; "algia" means pain) in the muscles. Of those suffering from this syndrome, approximately 80% are women between the ages of twenty and fifty.

While generalized pain and stiffness are the main symptoms, they are not the only ones. To diagnose someone with fibromyalgia, doctors look for numerous other symptoms as well.

Diagnostic Criteria for Fibromyalgia

The following criteria are used to give a medical diagnosis of fibromyalgia syndrome; widespread pain in all four quadrants of the body lasting for at least three months; tenderness in at least 11 of the 18 specified tender points; generalized aches or stiffness of at least three anatomical sites for at least three months; and exclusion of other disorders that are known to cause similar symptoms.

Minor Diagnostic Criteria for Fibromyalgia

Generalized fatigue; chronic headache; sleep disturbance; neurological and psychological complaints; joint swelling; numbing or tingling sensations; irritable bowel syndrome; variations of symptoms in relation to activity, stress, and weather changes; and temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ).

While doctors and scientists are uncertain about the cause of fibromyalgia, they observe that it often starts after an illness, injury, or trauma. In controlled clinical studies, none of the major classes of medications commonly prescribed for fibromyalgia (anti-depressants, sleep aids, anxiolytics, sedatives, muscle relaxants, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs — 'NSAIDS') had any significant benefit to people suffering from this syndrome.

Using a natural, holistic, and comprehensive approach that targets the main areas affected by the syndrome, many people experience symptom reversal or a complete recovery. I approach fibromyalgia syndrome by addressing the five main areas of progression of the disease at the same time. They include:

- Dysfunction of the energy centers of the cells (mitochondria);
- Altered reactions in the hypothalamus, pituitary, and adrenal glands;
- Digestive tract imbalances;
- Nervous system irregularities; and
- Build-up of toxins in the body.



Nutritional Supplementation

I recommend the following nutritional supplements to help the body heal from fibromyalgia. The quantities vary from one person to another.

Nutritional Supplement Primary Function(s)

- **I recommend Cellfood® to my clients to help oxygenate the cells, provide trace minerals, enzymes, and amino acids— all of which are needed to cleanse the body of toxins as well as rebuild the body.**
- Multiple vitamin and mineral— to address underlying vitamin or mineral deficiencies, and to nourish the cells.
- Flax oil— use cold-pressed flax oil (never heat) as a dressing for salads, baked potatoes, steamed vegetables, etc. to address deficiencies in omega-3 fatty acids required for healthy cells and immune systems.
- Malic acid and additional magnesium— people with fibromyalgia tend to be deficient in both malic acid and magnesium. The nutrients support the muscular system and energy production at the cellular level.
- Curcumin (in turmeric)
- Willow bark
- Co-enzyme Q-10
- Cayenne
- Ginger— to alleviate pain and inflammation, and improve circulation to the muscles
- Lactobacillus acidophilus and Bifidobacterium— to replenish friendly bacteria in the small and large intestines, thereby increasing absorption of nutrients and lessening digestive disturbances.
- Multi-enzyme and bromelain (enzyme in pineapple)— take an enzyme supplement with every meal to improve digestion. Take bromelain between meals to lessen inflammation in the body and to assist with detoxification.
- Pantothenic acid— if the adrenal glands are severely depleted due to long-term or severe stress, supplementary pantothenic acid can help them to rebuild.

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A Nutritional Approach

Food truly is the best medicine when it comes to virtually any disease or disorder and fibromyalgia is no different.

First, stay clear of foods you suspect are allergens. The most common ones include wheat and other gluten-containing grains such as barley, spelt, oats, rye, kamut, amaranth, and millet. Avoid milk and dairy products, sugar (in any form since it depletes the immune system— use the herbal extract stevia instead), artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, alcoholic beverages, caffeinated foods and beverages, soft drinks, food additives, colours, and preservatives, and peanuts (since the aflatoxins that grow on peanuts worsen symptoms— opt for almond butter instead). In addition to being common allergens, most of these foods cause or aggravate inflammation in the body.

So, you may be wondering: What's left? Eat a diet high in raw fruits and vegetables (emphasizing the vegetables). Try to eat at least 50% of your foods in a raw state. While this may sound difficult, it is actually quite easy. Simply add a large, raw salad to your lunch and dinner meals, have fruit at breakfast, and snack on vegetable crudité's, raw nuts and seeds, or fruit throughout the day. Drink eight to ten cups of pure, filtered water every day (limiting the quantity with meals to half a cup to take nutritional supplements) or freshly-made vegetable and fruit juices.

Since there are digestive troubles linked to fibromyalgia, fresh juices are an excellent way to supply the body with nutrients that are easy to assimilate. Fresh juices contain large amounts of enzymes that help break down inflammation, reduce pain, supply the cells with energy, and help the body heal. Focus primarily on vegetable juices. If you can't stand the taste add the juice of one apple. Apples are excellent food for sufferers of fibromyalgia since they supply malic acid— a compound needed to create cellular energy.

The remaining foods can include most vegetables, brown rice, pasta made from buckwheat, brown rice, or quinoa (without wheat or white flour), legumes, and pumpkin or sunflower seeds.

Exercise

Because the pain can be so disabling to people suffering from fibromyalgia, many people refrain from exercise that seems to worsen symptoms. However, over time, the lack of exercise weakens muscle tone, causing less blood and lymph to flow through the body and worsening symptoms. Exercise, started slowly and built up gradually over time, can often improve symptoms.

A 2002 Swedish study of the effect of pool exercise on fibromyalgia sufferers over six months found lasting improvements in symptom severity, physical function, and social function in participants engaging in regular exercise.

I have had tremendous results with the above dietary, supplementation, and exercise suggestions in the management of fibromyalgia. Stop suffering. You can restore your health using the power of foods, nutrients, herbs and exercise. ●

About the author:

Michelle Schoffro Cook, DAC, CNC, CITP, is an award-winning author, Doctor of Acupuncture, Biofeedback Therapist, Holistic Nutritionist, Bio-Terrain Analyst (laboratory nutritional testing), Energy Medicine Practitioner, Reiki Master, and Certified International Trade Professional.

Ms. Schoffro Cook is the author of two books: Healing Injuries and Competitive Intelligence (Kogan-Page, UK) which is published in English, Mandarin, and Bahasa Indonesian.

She won four awards for her writing and communications skills as well as the prestigious Forty Under 40 Award as one of the top business people in Canada's Capital Region. She writes two monthly columns: "Holistic Life Coach" and "Words to Live By" for Health 'N Vitality Magazine. She is a regular contributor to American Fitness, Impact!, and Natural Living Magazines.

Michelle Schoffro Cook wrote well over 150 articles for over 40 magazines and newspapers throughout Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. She is a health advisor to the Canadian federal government and the director of Healing Body, Mind & Spirit— a holistic health centre near Calgary, Canada.

Michelle can be contacted through her website at www.energyeffect.com.