

## Health Report: Fibromyalgia

### **Understanding Fibromyalgia and Your Options for Care**

Worldwide, fibromyalgia affects up to 5% of the population, or about 15 million people in the United States. It is a very common disorder, especially in women. Fibromyalgia is not a disease in the sense that it has a viral or bacterial cause. Rather, it is a collection of symptoms, mostly pain, affecting the neuromusculoskeletal system. In addition to pain, other aspects of your quality of life may be affected, including sleep deprivation (including lack of restorative sleep), general fatigue, and even depression. You may also have difficulties with concentration and even memory loss. Up to 40% of patients will have a mood disorder, such as depression or anxiety.

In terms of medical treatment options, there are antidepressants, muscle relaxants, anti-inflammatory drugs, and pain or narcotic medications. You should carefully consider these options and whether the risks are outweighed by any potential benefits. Studies are very limited for any type of treatment approach, so you may be presented with different options, by many different types of doctors.

Many patients do not consider non-drug treatments such as exercise and chiropractic care, but these less-invasive treatments are an important option. Spinal health is an important factor in a variety of health problems, including fibromyalgia. It's important to not think of the disease as having a single solution, but rather as a more complex entity, needing a comprehensive approach. But is there any research on the spine being involved in patients with fibromyalgia?

Recent research (Holman AJ. *Positional cervical spinal cord compression and fibromyalgia: a novel comorbidity with important diagnostic and treatment implications*. J Pain 2008; May 20 epub.) has looked into a specific problem seen in fibromyalgia patients: spinal cord compression. The scientist took MRIs of fibromyalgia patients with the neck in different positions such as forward and backward bending. These positions can show the spinal cord is compressed/pinched where a neutrally positioned MRI or CT scan may not. In the study, 71% of patients with fibromyalgia had positional cervical spinal cord compression.

So what does this mean? It means if you have fibromyalgia there may be an undetected cervical compression problem that may also be affecting you.

Good neck posture and mobility are keys to good health.

Despite the muscle pain you are experiencing, simply avoiding movement can lead to more chronicity of your condition. Aerobic exercises, as well as strength training, can bring dramatic relief of muscle pain for patients. Many patients find their mood is elevated when exercise becomes a part of the daily routine. Sleep may also be more restorative when you use your body more intensely during the day.

Lastly, weight-loss and proper nutrition are essential elements to overall good health. The important thing to consider is a multifactorial approach, which addresses your weight and nutritional habits, structure, lifestyle, and spinal hygiene. No one thing will be the magical "silver bullet" for fibromyalgia. If you'd like to discuss these comprehensive natural approaches to care, just call Dr. Frey at 621-8186. You can begin to take the step to better health by considering all of your options wisely.