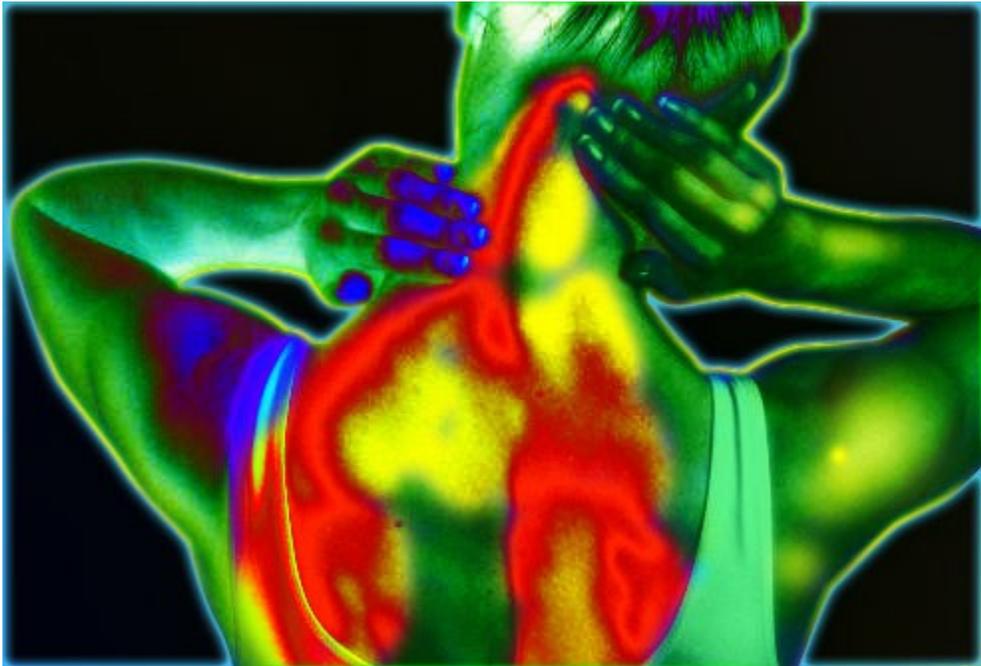


# ***What Is Fibromyalgia:***



***And Is There Anything I Can Do About It?***

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Have you or a loved one been diagnosed with Fibromyalgia? This is one of the most frustrating conditions a person can face. Many people with Fibromyalgia end up feeling hopeless and even desperate as they continue to search for an answer to the pain and the fatigue – an answer that does not materialize. This short paper is intended to provide you essential information about Fibromyalgia and offer some advice as to what you might be able to do to lessen the symptoms on your own or in a clinical setting. Please know that there is hope and there may well be solutions to your Fibromyalgia.

## ***WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?***

Some diagnoses are easier to get your head around than others. Are you familiar with the story of the blind men and the elephant? In the story six blind men are asked to determine what an elephant looks like by feeling different parts of the elephant's body. The blind man who feels a leg says the elephant is like a pillar; the one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope; the one who feels the trunk says the elephant is like a tree branch; the one who feels the ear says the elephant is like a hand fan; the one who feels the belly says the elephant is like a wall; and the one who feels the tusk says the elephant is like a pipe.

In one sense they are all right and yet they are all wrong for they are only experiencing just one part of the picture. Fibromyalgia is a lot like that. It is a complex condition that requires us to get a full picture if we are going to find any hope for resolution. And that is sometimes easier said than done. However, by focusing on just a single symptom of Fibromyalgia we may miss the constellation that is Fibromyalgia.

The word Fibromyalgia itself derives from the Greek and essentially translates as “pain in the muscles and fibrous tissues”. But, as we will see, this definition, while accurate on some levels, does not come close to understanding the depth and breadth of this condition. There has been an attempt to rename this condition as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) to better reflect the complexity of the condition but Fibromyalgia remains the more common descriptor and is the term that I will use throughout this paper.

About 2 -4% of the general population will experience Fibromyalgia with women representing as many as 90% of those afflicted. It can hit a person at any age but does seem to afflict adults far more than children. Often it is not easily diagnosed since there are few objective tests that can verify the diagnosis and they tend to be underutilized. For this reason, there has been a history of the medical community telling people that this “is all in their head” as if they are the source for the pain and enormous lack of quality in their lives. To some extent this attitude still exists although to a much lower degree.

## ***WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FIBROMYALGIA?***

There are many symptoms that people with Fibromyalgia might experience and they can be experienced to varying degrees in different people. That said, classic Fibromyalgia almost always will have the following three symptoms:

Diffuse pain – while the pain from Fibromyalgia can be very intense in certain parts of the body it tends to be a more diffuse, nagging, and continual pain that hits all four quadrants of the body. There is also a hyperalgesic quality to the pain which simply means things that should not cause pain, do. For many people the more intense pain can be localized in different parts of the body from one day to the next, but the more generalized pain is always there. Also, there are flare-ups of the pain when the overall symptoms are far worse than at other times.

Fatigue – this is not just a feeling of tiredness; this is a state of utter exhaustion. It will often pervade all aspects of a person's life making it hard to do the regular tasks of living. This fatigue is increased by the poor sleep patterns but exists independently.

Poor sleep patterns – poor sleep may be one of the most difficult symptoms to solve with Fibromyalgia but it is essential that it be worked on. The importance of deep restful sleep cannot be overemphasized.

Other common symptoms include:

Digestive tract problems – Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a very common symptom for Fibromyalgia sufferers. Any IBS patient can attest to the often-debilitating effects of this troubling condition.

Brain fog or Fibro Fog – this is a difficulty in thinking, focusing, or even getting the right word for the specific occasion. One person described this as “putting cotton around your brain”.

Chronic headaches – they can come in many different varieties with pain the common denominator. For some this is an continual problem while for others headaches will happen on sporadic occasions.

Hyper-sensitization of the normal senses – light, sound, smells, touch, and taste can be highly amplified. Sufferers have to be ever vigilant about where they go in order to lessen these troubling effects.

Allergy and sensitivity increase – this seems to work in both directions: there is an increase in the number of things that a person becomes more sensitive to. At the same time, there is very good research to show that the foods we eat can have an impact on Fibromyalgia in many sufferers.

Trouble regulating body temperature – it is common for people to have swings from being too hot to being too cold, with sensitivity to cold the more common experience.

Weight gain – with disruption in the way our body produces energy the average weight gain is over 30 pounds.

Depression, anxiety, or mood swings – this can be a very difficult symptom and can bring with it feelings of despair when added to the other symptoms of Fibromyalgia.

Thyroid dysfunction – this is a far more common concern and requires more thought and effort to deal with. One simple blood test, testing one aspect of thyroid function, may not be enough to get a true picture of this serious piece of the Fibromyalgia puzzle.

These are some of the more common symptoms that people with Fibromyalgia face daily making for a low quality of life. Again, it is important to note that no one person will necessarily have all these symptoms and no two people will experience them in the same way.

## ***DIAGNOSING FIBROMYALGIA:***

Diagnosing Fibromyalgia has been difficult over the years and still has some challenges today. For a long time it was a “diagnosis of exclusion” - if you have eliminated all the other things that it can't be, then you are left with Fibromyalgia. While I understand the logic of this approach – Fibromyalgia does have a lot of symptoms that might be something else – for the person suffering with Fibromyalgia the wait for all these tests can be interminable. So, while it is important to understand any other conditions that may be coincidental with Fibromyalgia I feel we have enough evidence to warrant a diagnosis of Fibromyalgia on its own.

In 1990, the American College of Rheumatology wrote the first set of guidelines for diagnosing Fibromyalgia. While there has been refinement of these guidelines they have not changed a lot in practical terms. One clear problem for diagnosis is that there are few objective tests that might verify the diagnosis, as you would for high blood sugar, for example. While there is a blood test that can give a lot of support for a Fibromyalgia diagnosis, it is not used a lot, as near as I can tell. Essentially, a diagnosis is arrived at by taking a careful history of presenting symptoms along with a routine physical evaluation looking for specific tender points on the body.

I see two types of people in my clinic from a Fibromyalgia perspective: those who have already been diagnosed and those I suspect might have Fibromyalgia. I always encourage those in the second category to seek out their physician's input since, by law, I cannot diagnose a medical condition. My own clinical assessment takes the following into consideration, among other things: does the person have pain in four quadrants of the body? Do they have a general fatigue most of the time? Is their sleep seriously impaired? If these questions are answered in the positive I will then palpate and record the severity of the tender points on the body. I also will assess the overall tension of the person's fascia and connective tissue. Combined, this will give me a good idea whether I am dealing with Fibromyalgia, or not.

## ***CAUSES OF FIBROMYALGIA:***

This is a challenging question that deserves some attention since in the cause of the problem we can often find the solution. It is also important to note that there is not agreement on this question. I will offer you the best answer from the research with the understanding that it is how I base my clinical work with Fibromyalgia.

Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, who had Fibromyalgia as a young medical student, has been doing work with Fibromyalgia patients for over thirty years. That work includes both clinical and formal research efforts. He describes Fibromyalgia as a Body Wide Energy Crisis or “blowing a fuse”, as he so vividly describes it. The root of the theory is that the hypothalamus, a part of our brain, gets suppressed for any number of reasons: infections, yeast overgrowth, hormonal deficiencies, food sensitivities, toxins, nutritional deficiencies, faulty digestion, stress, and disrupted sleep. When you consider the symptoms of a suppressed hypothalamus they are remarkably similar to those of Fibromyalgia.

A second researcher and clinician, the past Dr. John Lowe, argued that Fibromyalgia should be understood in large measure as a dysfunction of the thyroid and the inability of the system to produce or utilize thyroid hormones effectively. Given that thyroid hormones are the real energy producers of the body then this fits well with the Body Wide Energy Crisis just discussed. Once again, when comparing the symptoms of an underperforming thyroid with those of Fibromyalgia the similarities are striking.

The next piece of the puzzle is to consider one of the biggest potential energy drains on the human body – our fascia and connective tissue. When our fascia/connective tissue is in a state of tension it places an increased energy demand on our overall system in order to maintain that state of tension. There can be several reasons why a person would be in that increased state of tension including genetic reasons. While in that state of tension, if the body is subjected to a sudden assault – like an injury, accident, childbirth, viral, parasitic, or antibiotic sensitive infections – then the body essentially “blows a fuse” which is the hypothalamus becoming suppressed.

So, based on these observations, Fibromyalgia results as a combination of a number of factors all leading to an overall problem with how cellular energy is produced in the body. When the body is in this Energy Deficit state we will begin to see the myriad of symptoms that we see with Fibromyalgia. The hypothalamus is responsible for such things as sleep, hormonal function, body temperature, autonomic functions like digestive issues, among many other things. You may have noticed that the symptoms of a suppressed hypothalamus are strikingly similar to the symptoms of Fibromyalgia and an underperforming thyroid.

## ***TREATMENTS FOR FIBROMYALGIA:***

I mentioned earlier that inherent in the causes of Fibromyalgia we may well find the clues for its treatment. My clinical approach is based on the premise that we are dealing with a Body Wide Energy Deficit phenomenon. This places a great deal of stress on the whole body so rebuilding that energy is where we start. That end is accomplished with a multi-targeted approach.

Energy is produced in the mitochondria of the cell so we focus at the cellular level to rebuild and maximize energy production. The research of Dr. Teitelbaum demonstrates that Fibromyalgia is supplement intensive and there are three specific supplements required to reverse the energy deficit. Adherence to the supplement protocol is very important, especially in the earlier days of the program. There are also some clinical possibilities I will outline if you had access to a practitioner who had these services.

This treatment section is divided into two parts: first, things that you can do at home to help with your Fibromyalgia, and, second, an approach I use in the clinic if you were coming in to see me for treatment. The good news is that there is a protocol to follow that can help build the hypothalamus and is centered on rebuilding the energy production in the body. As that energy production increases the symptoms of the Fibromyalgia lessen – but it is not a quick process. It will take six months to a year so patience is necessary. There will be flares but there will also be more good days than bad as you move along. Both research and clinical demonstrate there is a good likelihood you can get some level of relief from using these protocols.

### ***Home care recommendations:***

1. **WATER:** For me, the very best place for you to start is to ensure that you are getting sufficient water, daily. Every cell in our body needs optimum hydration to function optimally. In addition, water is a critical part of ensuring that our fascia/connective tissue net is functioning properly, which is essential for rebuilding the energy levels of the body. How much water? I refer to the adage of 6 -8 glasses per day. If you are getting that amount of WATER daily then you should be fine.
2. **REST AND SLEEP:** A research study was conducted that took healthy people and deprived them of sleep for 2- 3 days. As a result, the participants developed Fibromyalgia-like symptoms that cleared up when the subjects were allowed to sleep. This indicates the importance of getting Fibromyalgia sufferers to get deep restful sleep. However, this is often much easier said than done.  
Here are some simple suggestions to help with this troubling area. So where do you start. Make sure that your room is as dark as you can make it. If you need to get up at night limit the amount of light that you experience. Melatonin, which is our sleep hormone, gets deactivated in the presence of light. Do an Epsom salts foot bath before going to bed and try to spend some time more quietly before sleeping. You can take melatonin, perhaps an herbal sleep remedy, or 5-HTP, which helps with serotonin production. This can help both sleep and overall mood. One simple trick is to adopt the slower breathing pattern of sleep.

Rest is also an important part of the process for those with Fibromyalgia. Regular naps can help the body recover and reduce the energy demand. I think our Mexican friends have gotten this part of living exactly right.

3. **EXERCISE:** Exercise has been shown to have definite benefits for those dealing with Fibromyalgia, but it must be done properly. There are really three things to remember with exercise in this situation: firstly, the emphasis should be on aerobic rather than strength-building at the outset. Secondly, the exercise needs to be regular and consistent. For example, walking daily would qualify as a great option. Thirdly, the exercise must be incremental and gentle. Only do as much as you can do without causing any negative effect and then add to that amount in very slow amounts. But the obvious challenge is that many people find it too difficult to do much exercise because of the pain they are experiencing. While this is understandable you should try to do even the most nominal amounts and build slowly. One person measured it in terms of circuits of the kitchen before venturing outside. Remember, aerobic, consistent, and incremental.

4. **SUPPLEMENTS:**

I am not discussing the use of pharmaceutical drugs in the treatment of Fibromyalgia although your physician may have prescribed, or will prescribe, one or more drugs for your condition. Some of them work better than others for different people but there is no drug that has good results in a general way. I will leave the pharmaceutical talk for your physician. The first two supplements are part of Dr. Teitelbaum's research parameters and are critical for success of the Fibromyalgia protocol.

**D-Ribose** - D-Ribose is a five-carbon sugar that is very important in cellular function. It is critical as part of our DNA and is valuable for helping with the energy production. The dosage is simple: 5 grams (tsp) 3 times per day in divided doses for 3 weeks, then 5 grams 2 times a day thereafter. D-Ribose can be somewhat expensive so I bring it in bulk form to keep the cost down for my clients. Drop me a line if you would like some.

**Acetyl-L-Carnitine** - Muscle biopsies show that people with Fibromyalgia are typically deficient in carnitine. Carnitine helps the cell with increasing cellular energy, the object of our efforts. Also, since it helps the cell use fat as an energy source it may help with weight control as well. This supplement is very important for laying the foundation for moving towards health. You would take 500 mg twice a day for four to six months and can be taken as either a pill or as a powder (the powder has a slightly bitter taste but is much more cost-effective).

**Magnesium** – Magnesium is one of the best minerals for ensuring that energy is produced effectively and utilized efficiently at the cellular level. It is also essential for the proper function of muscles, tendons, ligaments, and fascia and connective tissue. It is very important that you use an excellent bioavailable form to get the maximum amount of magnesium into your system. I recommend a Magnesium Bisglycinate or Magnesium Taurate, both very bioavailable options. Magnesium is one mineral that you should consider taking on a long-term basis where you would stop taking the D-Ribose and the

Acetyl-L-Carnitine over time if you so chose. I will say, if I could only take one supplement on a preventative basis it would be an excellent quality magnesium.

**Co-Enzyme Q 10** – I will mention one other supplement since it also is important for energy production at the cellular level. Supplementing with Co-Enzyme Q 10 is even more important if you are taking a statin drug for cholesterol lowering.

There are a number of other supplements that might be used in this protocol but these four are the most important for your consideration.

5. **Digestion and Intestinal Difficulties:** Intestinal challenges are often part of dealing with the pain of Fibromyalgia. Pain increase the stress response in the body which in turn can cause stomach problems – constipation, diarrhea, and so on. I always look at two key areas for gut concerns. First, get the bacteria in your digestive system back in balance. One simple way to do this is by drinking Kefir, a fermented milk product that is a probiotic. Often, this can be very beneficial but you may require a more concentrated probiotic treatment. Second, the introduction of digestive enzymes with your meals may prove to help with these digestive problems.
6. **Blood work:** Talk to your doctor about your iron levels for fatigue and energy. Also, because of the close relationship of thyroid disorder and Fibromyalgia it may be helpful to have tests that look at the active forms of the thyroid hormones. The role of these hormones and Fibromyalgia should not be underestimated.
7. **Other therapies:** There are also other physical therapies like massage, physiotherapy, chiropractic, and acupuncture that may be of benefit. Before treatment ensure that your therapist understands Fibromyalgia and what it means to treat someone with this diagnosis. For example, the research indicates that a deep massage for someone with Fibromyalgia will cause a lot of pain but with no therapeutic benefit. Gentle massage, on the other hand, can be very helpful. Remember, with Fibromyalgia in particular, “no pain, no gain”, could not be more wrong.

### ***CLINICAL TREATMENTS FOR FIBROMYALGIA:***

Most of the things we have talked about you can do from home or by phone consultation if it were difficult to travel. I do consult by phone if that were something you were interested in. If you see me at the clinic I generally do fascia/connective tissue relaxation and cold laser treatment work for the first couple of weeks, ideally twice per week. The cold laser work is intended to relieve the tension in the specific eighteen trigger points. There is a good study showing that if you can relieve this tension then there is less pain throughout the whole body.

The clinical process begins with an examination and assessment to determine where things are and to get a sense of a baseline from where we are starting. The program is multi-faceted, comprehensive, and specific to the individual. While the overall protocol is very similar from one person to the next the exact program is unique to you.

There are basically five areas I focus on from a clinical perspective, several of which we have discussed as part of the Home care section.

1. **Bowen Therapy:** this gentle, non-invasive therapy helps relax fascia and connective tissue which helps with lessening the tension throughout the body. By relieving systemic tension you will feel less pain overall. Bowen also helps to address imbalances in the nervous system that governs our stress response.
2. **Cold Laser Therapy:** laser therapy is a gentle, non-invasive therapy that activates cellular energy while increasing blood flow, bringing vital oxygen and nutrients to cells that may be deficient. There is no radiation produced by the laser, just a focused light that causes no heating or burning of tissue. Most people do not feel much if any sensation during a laser session.
3. **Supplements:** I have addressed the importance of supplements in the Home Care section. The effectiveness of these supplements as part of this whole process cannot be underestimated.
4. **Nutrition:** one of the things we consider is the role of nutrition in Fibromyalgia. There are some foods that can cause increased symptoms for some people and underlines the importance of doing things strategically for one person that you might not recommend for another person. It should be part of the overall program.
5. **Lifestyle Changes:** in some cases blood sugar abnormalities or other lifestyle habits may need to be addressed with lifestyle changes.

Combined, this multi-faceted approach has provided excellent results for people suffering from the symptoms of Fibromyalgia.

In closing, I want to get this one message across. No matter how much pain you or a loved one experiences, or how long it has been there, there is an excellent chance that you can gain some relief. This is not saying that I have some magical cure for your pain, although I truly wish I could say that. Nor am I saying that the process is quick, for it generally isn't. That's the bad news. But the good news is that there is hope. This program can alleviate your pain and suffering, to some degree, and in some cases, significantly.