

FIBROMYALGIA

By Dr. Heath Schipp, Chiropractor

Fibromyalgia is a common syndrome of aching, stiffness, and pain of the muscles and bones for greater than 3 months duration. The palpation of the multiple tender points reproduces tenderness in the absence of significant pathology. The condition is associated with headaches, stiffness, swelling, fatigue, dysmenorrhea, and sleep problems. Fibromyalgia is a common problem that affects 3.7 million Americans. Almost 90% of fibromyalgia patients are women, who are usually between 40-50 years old. The syndrome costs Americans more than \$10 billion annually.

Fibromyalgia is a recently identified syndrome. It was not until 1993 that the World Health Organization officially recognized fibromyalgia as a disease. These factors cause fibromyalgia to be a commonly misdiagnosed condition. Many practitioners don't know the criteria needed to properly diagnose fibromyalgia. In addition, the criteria needed for diagnosis are very subjective. Lab testing such as x-rays and blood tests will reveal nothing. The average fibromyalgia patient visits more than 5 medical practitioners, spends thousands of dollars, and has symptoms for 5 years before an accurate diagnosis is made. There are many different treatments for this syndrome and they vary widely in their effectiveness.

Fibromyalgia is a disease that is characterized by two main criteria. The first criteria is that the patient must have widespread pain that has been present for at least 3 months. Pain is only considered widespread if it is found on both sides of the body, above and below the waist, and in the skeleton. The second criteria is that pain must be present in 11 of 18 tender points on palpation. These points are located at the base of the head, low neck, second rib, above the elbow, in the gluteal region, at the top of the hip, and in the middle of the knee.

The cause of all fibromyalgia is unknown, so treating this disease can be difficult. All of the treatments have limitations and many have very little evidence backing their effectiveness. In a study of both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic interventions, less than half of the patients had adequate symptom relief. Some of the most common treatments are drug therapy, chiropractic adjustment with soft tissue ischemic compression, stress management, acupuncture, exercise, and education.

Chiropractic can be effective in managing fibromyalgia. In Hain's study, patients showed a drop of pain intensity (77.1%), an enhanced quality of sleep (63.5%), and less fatigue (74.8%). The reasoning behind using chiropractic for management is because adjusting can inhibit

pain, relax paraspinal muscles, break articular adhesions, and increase the range of motion. Exercises such as aerobic dance, stationary cycling, and aerobic walking can help with treatment.

Fibromyalgia is commonly misdiagnosed, and when it is diagnosed properly many patients are put on treatments that are ineffective or unresearched. Medication is a treatment which many people doubt the effectiveness of. Fortunately, some studies have shown chiropractic to be an effective form of treatment. Acupuncture has studies which state that it can be effective as well. Exercise in combination with other treatments has been shown to be effective. Patient education and stress reduction can also reduce some of the symptoms of fibromyalgia. Consult your chiropractor if you think you could be suffering from fibromyalgia.