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## Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine for Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) affects an estimated 2 percent of the population. It is diagnosed when there is a history of widespread pain in all four quadrants of the body for a minimum duration of three months, and pain when pressure is applied to at least 11 of 18 designated tender points on the body. In addition to musculoskeletal pain, patients with fibromyalgia can suffer with chronic fatigue, sleep disturbance, brain fog, mood swings, digestive problems, TMJ, and sensitivity to light, noise and smells. Also, those with fibromyalgia have sensitivities or intolerance to foods, such as gluten, sugar and dyes.



### What is Fibromyalgia Syndrome?

From the perspective of western medicine, fibromyalgia is a medically unexplained syndrome characterized by chronic widespread pain, a heightened and painful response to pressure, insomnia, fatigue and depression. Fibromyalgia is often misdiagnosed or misunderstood by many western practitioners.

While not all affected persons experience all associated symptoms, the following symptoms commonly occur together -- chronic pain, debilitating fatigue, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, depression, joint stiffness, chronic headaches, dryness, hypersensitivity, inability to concentrate (called "fibro fog"), incontinence, irritable bowel syndrome, numbness, tingling or poor circulation in the hands and feet, painful menstrual cramps or restless legs syndrome.

On its own fibromyalgia does not result in any physical damage to the body or its tissues and there are no laboratory tests that can confirm this diagnosis. Symptoms often begin after a physical or emotional trauma, but in some cases there appears to be no triggering event. Women are more prone to develop the disorder than are men, and the risk of fibromyalgia increases with age.

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## Fight Fibromyalgia with Nutrient Dense Foods

The National Fibromyalgia Association recommends a balanced diet containing nutrient dense foods free of artificial additives and sweeteners to help your body fight fibromyalgia syndrome. Some key nutrients to include are:

### **B-Complex**

Found in whole grains, beans, nuts, chicken, fish and eggs; B complex vitamins directly influence the nervous system's proper functioning and combat nerve problems such as tingling and tenderness.

### **Magnesium**

Found in nuts, grains, beans, fish, meat and dark green vegetables magnesium is needed for muscle flexibility and bone,

Research shows that up to 90 percent of people with fibromyalgia have turned to complementary or alternative medicine to manage their symptoms. Acupuncture, in particular, has become a popular treatment choice and has been shown to be an effective treatment for FMS.

### **An Oriental Medicine Perspective**

Oriental medicine does not recognize fibromyalgia as one particular disease pattern. Instead, it aims to treat the symptoms unique to each individual depending on their constitution, emotional state, the intensity and location of their pain, digestive health, sleeping patterns and an array of other signs and symptoms.

Since symptoms of fibromyalgia vary greatly from one person to another, a wide array of traditional and alternative treatments have been shown to be the most effective way of treating this difficult syndrome.

Therefore, if 10 people are treated with Oriental medicine for fibromyalgia, each of these 10 people will receive a unique, customized treatment with different acupuncture points, different herbs and different lifestyle and dietary recommendations.

A treatment program may include a combination of psychological or behavioral therapies, medications, exercise, acupuncture, herbal medicine and bodywork.

Since pain is a hallmark symptom of fibromyalgia, an Oriental medicine approach will incorporate treatment for pain, though this may differ from western "pain management" therapies. The Oriental medicine theory of pain is expressed in this famous Chinese saying: "Bu tong ze tong, tong ze bu tong" which means "free flow: no pain, no free flow: pain."

Pain is seen as a disruption of the flow of Qi within the body. The disruption of Qi that results in fibromyalgia is usually associated with disharmonies of the Liver, Spleen, Kidney and Heart systems.

## **5 Tools for Fibromyalgia Symptom Relief**

Although fibromyalgia is a disorder that can be disabling for many due to chronic widespread pain and fatigue there are some things you can do to alleviate the symptoms and improve your overall quality of life.

### **Learn and Practice Stress Reduction Techniques**

Chronic stress can lead to fatigue, depression, a weakened immune system, and a host of serious physical and psychological ailments. When under stress your muscles contract and tense affecting nerves, blood vessels, organs, skin and bones. Chronically tense muscles can result in a variety of musculoskeletal conditions and disorders including muscle spasms and pain.

While it isn't always possible to remove the issues that cause you stress, the ability to effectively deal with stress may need to be a learned. Take time for yourself which includes doing the things you enjoy and that make you feel good, don't overwhelm yourself with activities, and listen to your body when it

protein and fatty acid formation.

Magnesium is also integral in making new cells, relaxing muscles, clotting blood, aiding in calcium absorption and activating B vitamins.

### **Omega 3**

Directly affecting cellular function, this fatty acid found in fish minimizes nerve sensitivity and improves cognition.

### **Vitamin C**

Helps combat stress, builds the immune system and reduces swelling. Vitamin C is found in a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables including citrus fruits, green vegetables, tomatoes and berries.

### **Water**

Increases circulation of oxygen and nutrients throughout the body and helps to eliminate waste.

## **Fibromyalgia Study**

A study from the Mayo Clinic found acupuncture helpful in treating the fatigue and anxiety commonly experienced by fibromyalgia patients.

In the trial, patients who received acupuncture to counter fibromyalgia symptoms reported improvement in fatigue and anxiety, among other symptoms.

Those who received acupuncture treatments reported less fatigue and anxiety one month following treatment than the group that did not.

According to David Martin, M.D., Ph.D., lead author and a Mayo Clinic anesthesiologist, the study "affirms a lot of clinical impressions that this complementary medical technique is

needs rest.

### **Eat a Well Balanced Diet**

Managing your diet may seem time-consuming but the benefits it offers make it worthwhile. Many fibromyalgia sufferers find relief through taking the time to know how food affects them and following a holistic and properly managed diet. A list of basic nutrients to combat nerve sensitivities, improve cognition, boost the immune system, and reduce swelling is included in this newsletter.

### **Exercise**

While even basic movements may be painful, exercise helps restore strength and endurance. Tai Chi, Qi Gong or Yoga are great for much needed stretching, gentle strengthening, deep breathing, as well as great for relaxation.

Gentle stretching will clear tension that builds when muscles tighten, and will improve overall circulation.

Be sure to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

### **Meditate**

The practice of meditation is a proven stress reducer that helps the body create a sense of calm and a continuing sense of well being. While 15 minutes daily is recommended, even 5 or 10 minutes can have a powerful effect on your day.

### **Restorative Sleep**

Get at least eight hours of restorative sleep. Maintain a routine sleep schedule and make your bedroom a sanctuary from every day stress. Practicing good sleep hygiene will give your body an opportunity to get stronger and heal.

helpful for patients."

Dr. Martin performed the study with co-authors Ines Berger, M.D.; Christopher Sletten, Ph.D.; and Brent Williams. The study only examined patients who reported more severe symptoms, offering better experimental control.