

## **Back Pain Part 3 - Fibromyalgia**

By Dr. Donald Hudson

Back pain plagues almost all humans. The basic structure of our body puts a lot of stress on the low back and the supporting structures. The work most of us do requires long hours doing motions that are not designed to strengthen our body, but rather to stress them. We all work under varying degrees of environmental and psychological stress and that puts additional stressors on the muscles, tendons, ligaments, and internal chemistry of our bodies. This article will discuss one cause of back pain called fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia is a diagnosis that relates to pain probably caused by stress. Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition characterized by fatigue and wide spread pain in the fibrous tissues in the muscles, tendons and ligaments. People with fibromyalgia often feel pain in their neck, spine, shoulders and hips.

Diagnosing fibromyalgia can be difficult. There are no blood or X-Ray tests that are abnormal in fibromyalgia. The common conditions that mimic fibromyalgia can usually be excluded by examination and laboratory tests. Your provider should not make the diagnosis of fibromyalgia unless that you have widespread pain lasting three or more months in at least 11 of the 18 “trigger points” identified by the American College of Rheumatology.

While many doctors find the diagnosis of fibromyalgia convenient for someone with chronic pain, only those with those trigger points mentioned are actually candidates for this diagnosis. If you do not meet the 11 of 18 trigger points, other causes should be investigated. The diagnosis of fibromyalgia implies that the aches and pains are in specific multiple areas in the neck, shoulders, upper back, lower back and hip areas.

Most people with fibromyalgia have no underlying disorders, while others have conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, spinal arthritis, hypothyroidism, or Lyme’s disease. Fibromyalgia may also include symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, tension headaches, and numbness or tingling of the extremities.

The cause of fibromyalgia is unknown. Things that may contribute to the development of fibromyalgia or sustain the symptoms are psychological stress, immune or endocrine abnormalities, or biochemical abnormalities in the central nervous system. Altered serotonin levels would be an example of this. Fibromyalgia is relatively common and affects approximately two percent of the U.S. population. It occurs seven times more frequently in women than men. It is diagnosed most frequently in women of child bearing age.

If you are diagnosed with fibromyalgia you should know that even though you have pain, your tissues are not damaged and the pain can be successfully managed.

While there is no known cure, it is important to know that you can help yourself, by including heat treatments, occasionally cold applications, massage, regular stretching, and range-of-motion exercises. You need to attempt to maintain a near ideal body weight, and drink lots of fluids (mostly water). The addition of antidepressants and working of a stress management plan and psychological consultation will benefit almost all patients with this diagnosis. A consult with a Rheumatologist may also be helpful to rule out other potentially progressive rheumatic diseases.

Your practitioner may use local anesthetic or steroid injections into the trigger points for pain control; these can be very effective for some patients.

Fibromyalgia is a very complicated disease and requires a complex treatment plan. If you have questions, please contact your practitioner at the clinic.