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Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine for Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) affects an estimated two 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 fatigue, sleep disturbance, memory loss, mood swings, and digestive problems.

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.

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 in mouth, nose, and eyes
- hypersensitivity
- inability to concentrate (called "fibro fog")
- incontinence
- irritable bowel syndrome
- numbness, tingling or poor circulation in the hands and feet
- painful menstrual cramps
- 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 which can confirm this diagnosis. Symptoms often begin after a physical or emotional trauma, but in many 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:

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.

If you have fibromyalgia, acupuncture and Oriental medicine may be what you've been looking for to ease your symptoms and reclaim your health and vitality. Please call for a consultation today.

Find 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 external forces causing stress the ability to effectively deal with stress is a choice. Take time for yourself and cultivate the energy you need to handle your stress more effectively.

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, 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.

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 a 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 easy stretches, careful strengthening, deep breathing, along with relaxation techniques.

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 8 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.

Acupuncture and 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 their fibromyalgia symptoms reported improvement in fatigue and anxiety, among other symptoms. Acupuncture was well tolerated, with minimal side effects. Those who received acupuncture treatments reported less fatigue and anxiety one month following treatment than did the group who 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 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. Still, Mayo Clinic doctors urge further studies to see how acupuncture can best be used in treating fibromyalgia patients.

Are Calcium Supplements Safe?

For decades women have been told that taking calcium supplements will improve bone health and ward off osteoporosis. Recent research into calcium supplementation would seem to cast serious doubt on the wisdom of that advice.

A 2010 British Medical Journal meta-analysis based on five clinical trials involving over 8,000 people found that taking 500mg or more of elemental calcium supplements increased the risk of heart attacks by 27%! A second meta-analysis showed that taking elemental calcium with Vitamin D, which helps calcium be absorbed into bones, increased heart attack AND stroke risks, and a 2012 study of 24,000 people aged 35 to 64 found that those who took calcium supplements were 86% more likely to have a heart attack than those who did not take supplements.

Now, a Swedish study that followed 61,433 older women for an average of 19 years has found that those who consumed 1,400mg or more of calcium per day more than doubled their risk of death from heart disease compared with those who took between 600 and 1,000mg.

It is not clearly stated in the above studies and analyses, which form of elemental calcium supplements the participants used. I assume that most, if not all, of the calcium was calcium carbonate. Calcium carbonate is usually made from oyster shell, limestone, and bone meal. It is very cheap to make and is the most common form of calcium found in calcium supplements and multiples, especially in the cheaper varieties sold in pharmacies, grocery stores and other stores like Walmart.

Calcium is added to many foods these days, including orange juice, milk, baby formula, and boxed cereals, but it is usually in the form of calcium carbonate, which does more harm than good. Our bodies do need calcium. In fact, the calcium we get from whole foods may even help us live longer. Dark, green leafy vegetables are a good dietary source of calcium. Dairy products are also excellent, especially if they are from raw milk. The studies done about calcium from dairy products, which have not shown impressive results, have all used pasteurized dairy, rather than raw. Raw dairy products retain more of their nutritional integrity and value.

The belief that calcium builds strong bones is an accepted fact in our culture, even though there is little evidence to support the claim. This is just another example of effective marketing trumping sound scientific study. In fact, most studies of calcium supplementation for bone strength have found little or no bone health benefit.

Bone is made up of at least a dozen minerals, and according to the book "The Calcium Lie", by Dr. Robert Thompson, the exclusive focus on calcium supplements for bone health is likely to worsen bone density and increase the risk for osteoporosis.

Your body needs other minerals like silica and magnesium along with Vitamin K2 and Vitamin D to maintain and build a strong bone structure. Vitamin K2 helps bind calcium to bone. It also prevents coronary calcification, which was found to be a problem with the people in the studies who took calcium supplements. Without enough K2, Vitamin D supplements may actually encourage heart disease. Good food sources of Vitamin K2 are leafy greens, fermented soy products like tempeh and natto, and raw milk products.

Historically, women have consumed horsetail tea, which is a good source of silica, for their bones. Other good sources of silica are cucumbers, oat straw, nettles, bell peppers, and tomatoes. Dr. Thompson recommends the use of a natural, unprocessed salt which can provide many of the trace minerals needed for bone health.

If you want to add calcium to your diet with a supplement, use calcium lactate from a company that makes their products from whole foods. Standard Process is one supplement company I can recommend. You probably don't need to take much as your body usually only excretes about 100mg of calcium per day. Check to be sure that the supplement contains some magnesium. Calcium Lactate from a whole food source is the easiest to digest and absorb. If you don't think you get enough Vitamin K2 from your diet, add a Vitamin K2 supplement.

Check your blood levels of Vitamin D3 and supplement until you are in the good range, between 60-80 nmol/L. Eat whole food sources of these important nutrients and drink a tea made from nettles, horsetail, and oat straw.

To your continued good health!

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