Managing Fibromyalgia and Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Coping With Fibro and RA Safely and Effectively

Pain can be widespread in both fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis, hitting any number of points in the body suddenly and aggressively. The two conditions differ when it comes to symptom sites and disease progression, but in some cases, they can occur together.

Although neither condition is known to *cause* the other, those with RA seem to be more prone to developing fibromyalgia. On the other hand, fibromyalgia sufferers are at no greater risk of developing RA than anyone else. If you have been diagnosed with RA, it's important to watch out for fibromyalgia symptoms, in order to avoid increasing discomfort and treatment complications.

Similar Symptoms, Different Sources

Although it's not exactly like other types of arthritis, the pain of RA is unmistakably arthritic in nature, involving symptoms like:

- Tender joints
- Warm, inflamed skin
- Redness and swelling at the joints
- Deep ache in the extremities and digits that can be immobilizing during a flare

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease characterized by inflammation of the joints, a response that sends the body into attack mode, but since there is no foreign body to attack, the structures in the joints bear the damage. Fibromyalgia, on the other hand, is considered an "arthritis-related condition"; some symptoms are comparable to the discomforts of RA, but the pain develops differently and brings different consequences.

Fibromyalgia pain is focused in the muscles, and though experts are not entirely sure of the source, it is thought to come from a neurological misfiring, not an autoimmune response. In turn, fibromyalgia doesn't seem to bring that risk of permanent joint or tissue damage, because it does not involve the same degree of inflammation.

How to Treat Both Conditions Simultaneously

RA pain tends to come and go, while fibromyalgia pain typically sticks around (though it may wax and wane in intensity). The first step to effective treatment is to pinpoint which condition you suffer from, since an RA diagnosis calls for a quick response in order to protect against long-term joint damage.

If you do suffer from both RA and fibromyalgia, you can concentrate on a few key areas for more relief, good joint protection, and a better quality of life:

- **Sleep quality –** Getting enough quality sleep is vital for good health, especially if you live with a chronic

condition. Sleep problems are quite common among fibromyalgia sufferers, and poor sleep can lead to greater pain sensitivity and emotional problems.

- **Daily pain levels –** Some experts believe that the pain of RA can trigger fibromyalgia flares and elevate all your symptoms. Therefore, managing your day-to-day joint pain with the right medication will help control both conditions.
- **Emotional health –** Both RA and fibromyalgia can deeply disrupt your life, and many people can become depressed as they struggle through flares or lose functionality. When you suffer from both conditions, it's even more important to have a strong support network to lean on. Communication is key to emotional management, and support groups can important assets.

Work to improve your sleep hygiene, fitness level, and perspective on your disease and your life. Some simple changes like a new hobby or a rigid bedtime routine can do wonders for your comfort level, and surrounding yourself with understanding, positive and proactive people can improve your quality of life immensely. However, managing your conditions means sticking to your treatment plan every day, so whatever changes or additions you and your doctor choose, you need to commit to them wholeheartedly for the good of your health.