Is There a Link Between Fibromyalgia and Trauma?

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The Connection Between Fibromyalgia and Trauma

If you suspect that a painful or difficult event in your past could have something to do with your present discomfort, you're not alone. Many fibromyalgia patients swear that a traumatic event – whether it was a car accident, serious illness, or a severely stressful time – triggered their symptoms, even if they can't prove it.

In other cases, the cause is not so clear, and those with chronic pain struggle onward without realizing that there may be more to their condition than they imagine. A better understanding of the relationship between fibromyalgia and trauma may help you get better, lasting relief.

Experiences that Could Trigger Fibromyalgia

Trauma comes in a number of forms, and the aftermath can last for a very long time – or spark a new condition down the line. Although the connection isn't completely understood, many people with fibromyalgia can trace the onset of their symptoms to a certain physical or emotional trauma, or series of traumatic events. After decades of research, many experts are convinced that these do indeed cause fibromyalgia:

- **Emotional trauma –** Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been linked to fibromyalgia, but even more moderate stress could impact this particular pain response. It has been found that chronic stress causes serotonin to drop and substance P to increase, which is precisely what occurs in fibromyalgia patients.
- **Childhood trauma –** Some experts suggest that certain types of traumatic events during childhood can lead to the onset of fibromyalgia, such as a lengthy separation from a parent or another isolating event. Studies have shown that childhood abuse, living with an alcoholic parent or battling a severe illness significantly raises the chances of developing chronic pain condition later in life.

- **Infections –** It's clear that infections can trigger flare-ups in fibro patients, so it's no surprise that some infections are thought to trigger the fibromyalgia in those who are genetically predisposed to the condition. Hepatitis and HIV have led to fibromyalgia reactions, but different strains of influenza and adenoviruses (common cold and other respiratory infections) may also trigger the onset of fibro symptoms.
- **Major Injury –** Events that cause injury to the torso and upper body seem to increase the risk of developing fibromyalgia more than breaks or sprains in the limbs. Neck injuries (like whiplash) are particularly dangerous – patients are 10 times more likely to develop fibromyalgia within one year of their injury.

Treating the Trauma for Relief

It's important to concentrate on treating your current fibromyalgia symptoms, but since there seems to be such a strong link between trauma and chronic pain, your past may be worth a bit of investigation, too. Although you can't go back in time and undo the traumatic event, a better understanding could help to control its ongoing

effects.

Pinpointing the trauma is not always an easy task, especially when there’s no clear, physical event to blame. Discuss with your doctor any jarring events that you think may be connected to your fibromyalgia symptoms, and whether a counselor, physiotherapist, or rehabilitation specialist may be able to shed some light on the matter.

In the case of emotional trauma, working through some of the scarring and resentment can leave you with a much more positive outlook. That positivity that do wonders for your pain: studies have shown that a calm and optimistic attitude may reduce the sensation of pain. It can also improve sleep quality, and good sleep can decrease pain sensitivity.