Can Menopause Make Fibro Symptoms Worse?

by DEBRA FERRIS

Managing Menopause and Fibromyalgia

If you have fibromyalgia, you are already familiar with its symptoms: body-wide aches and pains, exhaustion, and point tenderness in different areas of the body. The cause of fibromyalgia can be influenced by numerous factors, the onset of menopause being one.

Menopause and Fibromyalgia

Hypothyroidism, or decreased functionality of the thyroid gland, can occur in many women during menopause and is commonly overlooked. Some physicians believe hypothyroidism might be one cause of fibro. As for myself, I was diagnosed and am being treated for hypothyroidism but continue to have symptoms.

It makes sense that there would be a connection between the onset of menopause and fibro as most women are diagnosed during middle age. Research suggests that symptoms can indeed be worse for menopausal and postmenopausal women than for women who are still menstruating.

Menopause, with the accompanying estrogen loss, can lead to sleep disturbances, depression and anxiety. It is thought that these hormonal changes, along with calcium loss, can lead to the hallmark signs of fibro.

Fibromyalgia hot flashes are also common at night, just as they are with menopause.

Changes in brain chemicals, such as serotonin, during menopause can also lead to difficulties with pain and mood and affect pain perception. Having your hormones checked, even if you are already on hormone replacement therapy (HRT), should be discussed with your gynecologist.

If your estrogen levels are low, bone and joint pain can occur, leading to many of the symptoms of fibro. If you have been on one type of HRT for a number of years, it does not mean you are on the proper dosage since your body's needs can change over time. Some women who have had their hormones rechecked have found them to be completely under-controlled, so a hormone check every few years should be a part of your gynecological routine.

Check On Your Bones

Spinal issues can also exacerbate fibromyalgia symptoms. As you age, bones lose calcium and weaken. Ask your physician if an MRI might be in order to check the condition of your bones. My MRI found problems throughout my spine that could be causing some of my symptoms.

Ask your physician how much calcium and vitamin D you should be taking during menopause. You will need much more than you did when you were menstruating. Vitamin K2 should discussed as well, as this vitamin aids in preventing calcium from forming in muscle tissue.

Fibro Management

Several prescription drugs are on the market specifically created for the treatment of fibromyalgia — Savella, Lyrica and Cymbalta being the big three. However, as with all drugs, side effects can occur.

If you are taking one of these medications, pay close attention to what your body is telling you and how you feel while on them. Personally, I cannot take Lyrica as it creates a slew of unusual side effects, but Cymbalta works well for nerve pain.

Savella is actually an antidepressant that works on the uptake of serotonin in the brain, which is useful since menopausal changes in serotonin are thought to be one reason for the pain of fibromyalgia.

It is of the utmost importance for any woman who suspects she has fibromyalgia to find a good pain physician who understands what is happening and can relieve their pain. A neurologist can be a good start, but I believe a reputable pain physician is essential.

Some pain reduction can be provided by spinal injections, with steroids or without. Prolotherapy does not require the use of steroids, which some believe can actually harm the joints, but instead utilizes saline and a “scarring” solution that allegedly helps strengthen joints. I currently receive these injections and still have some very bad days, but not quite as bad as they have been in the past.

Talk to your general practitioner or gynecologist, get a referral and get help! But, do your homework online first and learn more about your condition and what might be the best way for you to manage your pain.

Fibromyalgia is too complex an issue for you to walk into your doctor’s office without the ammunition of knowledge. So, hit the computer hard and look for reputable online resources and who knows, perhaps you will know more about fibromyalgia than your physician!