Considering Natural Treatment for Fibromyalgia

by ANGELA FINLAY

Fibromyalgia Natural Treatment Options to Consider

Fibromyalgia has always been a stubborn challenge for doctors and patients alike. Since the condition is so difficult to measure, monitor and predict there is no easy solution.

On the other hand, there are several approaches to relieving the chronic fatigue, pain, ache, anxiety and weariness that comes with the condition. Conventional medicine has not yet found a cure for fibromyalgia, but many patients have enjoyed significantly more relief by combining promising alternative treatments with the medical wisdom of their doctors.

The challenge is in picking and choosing the right approaches for you. Before jumping head-first into alternative treatments, consider what the research says.

You'll be happy to learn how many potential therapies are at your fingertips, but it's always best to proceed with caution and a good understanding of the pros and cons.

Nutritional Supplements

The realm of nutritional and natural supplements is expanding, and there seems to be a new cure-all every week or two. Of course, there is no simple way to overcome the stain and pain of fibromyalgia, but certain supplements could offer more than a marketing ploy.

Research is ongoing, but these are the leading supplements out there for fibromyalgia, including what they can (and can't) do:

5-Hydroxytryptophan

This is a crucial compound in serotonin — the neurotransmitter responsible for regulating mood, your sleep cycle and sensitivity to pain. Studies have found a staggering amount of fibromyalgia cases feature low serotonin levels, which suggests boosting your intake in the form of a supplement could be a good idea.

Some studies have found supplementing with 5-HTP noticeably improved depression and sleep symptoms in fibromyalgia patients, but other studies show 5-HTP might not be as powerful as it appears.

SAM-e

This compound has been used for a few different conditions, though researchers are still unsure how it works in the body. It's possible that supplementing with SAM-e increases your dopamine and serotonin levels, which might improve mood and sleep patterns.

There’s little evidence to suggest SAM-e is an effective therapy for fibromyalgia patients, especially since it doesn’t appear to combat muscle pain and tenderness. On the other hand, there doesn’t seem to be much downside, other than a few rare and mild side effects.

Melatonin

A natural precursor to sleep, melatonin supplements have gained popularity in recent years for their perceived ability to counter jet lag and influence sleep patterns. Some recent have also suggested that melatonin may be able to help with fibromyalgia pain, as well.

The general safety of melatonin is one of its most appealing attributes: there are few side effects as long as you stay within the recommended dosage, but as with any medication that can make you drowsy, you must be cautious about driving.

L-Carnitine

This amino acid is naturally produced in the body, but an extra helping might be able to relieve pain and alleviate emotional strain that comes with fibromyalgia. Studies have been limited, but initial findings suggest that symptoms could improve significantly.

Any supplements will carry some risk, and they might not affect every patient the same. Never start a course of supplements on a whim — your doctor can give you sound advice and help you weigh the risks and rewards according to your unique case.

Keep in mind nutritional supplements also don’t get to work overnight, so prepare to wait at least a few weeks before deciding whether or not it’s working for you.

Next page: physical and psychological therapies to try.

Physical and Psychological Therapies

Diet (and supplements) plays a central role in your overall health, but don’t discount the power of a healing touch — or sound, or thought. Many physical therapies can get deep into your mind and body for intense and long-lasting relief, but you need to find the right treatments for your sets of symptoms.

Different therapies tend to target certain symptoms better than others, so you might consider tailoring your treatments to your biggest fibro challenges.

Muscle Pain and Tension

Massage is a natural antidote to muscle tension, and though it can help tame fibro symptoms your therapist will need to be careful not to aggravate tender tissue. Find a therapist who has experience with chronic pain — or better yet, fibromyalgia — and don’t be shy about communicating any painful sensations or falling comfort level every step of the way.

Acupuncture has gained ground as a leading treatment for chronic pain, and recent studies support that it is indeed more effective than a placebo. Moreover, there are very few possible side effects to treatment (as long as you work with a professional and accredited acupuncturist), so consider it as a complement to, or replacement for, massage.

Fatigue and Fibro Fog

It might seem counterintuitive, but exercise can be one of your most powerful tools to fight fatigue. It gets your metabolism going and your endorphins flowing, and the best part is the energizing effects last for hours after you

finish.

The tricky part is knowing when to try to rev up your system, and when to allow for a rest. A big cup of coffee likely won't cut it, but neither will consecutive naps throughout the day.

Instead, L-carnitine might work better, which can help with both sleep and cognitive functioning. There is also some evidence the gingko biloba herb can boost brain metabolism.

Depression and Anxiety

Supplements such as SAM-e and L-carnitine can add helpful compounds to your natural stores, and this boost can help improve your mood and encourage better sleep for a better emotional balance. In fact, even milder naturally-derived supplements like St. John's wort have been shown to help people shift to a more positive outlook.

Serotonin supplements (like 5-HTP) and the SSRI class of antidepressants would appear to be good options, but recent research suggests that more serotonin could actually make things worse if you're struggling with depression.

Sleep Problems

Your best bet to overcoming sleep problems? Improving your activity levels and getting a bit of outside help from mild sleep-promoting agents.

Make sure you exercise daily, even if it's just some very gentle yoga on particularly painful days, and consider adding a melatonin supplement (with your doctor's permission).

Relaxation therapies are other excellent approaches for better sleep: learning to calm your mind and control your breathing can lower your heart rate and set you up for a better night's sleep. Daily meditation is a great place to start.

Proceeding With Caution

Alternative treatments have become so popular that a National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) has been introduced to investigate and assess them. There are now firm guidelines in place to protect your health and safety while you explore new treatment option, but remember that nothing is a replacement for the advice of a doctor, nutritionist, and other member of your healthcare team.