Myofascial Pain Syndrome and Fibromyalgia: Yes, There Is a Difference!

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Myofascial Pain Syndrome vs. Fibromyalgia

Many different chronic pain disorders affect many people. At first look, it may seem that all chronic pain is the same. But this is not the case. Pinpointing which one you have will affect your treatment options.

It is also possible to have more than one chronic pain disorder simultaneously. Two such disorders that are sometimes found to overlap are myofascial pain syndrome and fibromyalgia. What are the differences between these disorders? Is there a difference in how they are diagnosed and treated? Let's find out.

What Is Myofascial Pain Syndrome?

Myofascial pain syndrome (MPS) is a chronic pain disorder. MPS occurs when pressure on sensitive points, also called trigger points, in the muscles leads to pain in the muscle. MPS may also cause pain in other areas of the body, known as referred pain.

Muscle tension and pain are not uncommon, but with myofascial pain syndrome the pain persists or gets worse over time.

Symptoms of Myofascial Pain Syndrome

- Deep and aching muscle pain
- Persistent or worsening pain
- Tender muscle knots
- Difficulty sleeping due to pain

Causes of Myofascial Pain Syndrome

Sensitive areas of tight muscle fibers, or trigger points, can develop in the muscles. These trigger points can lead to strain and pain throughout the muscle. When the muscle pain persists or worsens, it is called myofascial pain syndrome.

- **Repetitive muscle stress.** Repetitive motions in certain muscles because of work, hobbies, or sports can cause a trigger point in the muscle.
- **Muscle injury.** An injury in the muscle may develop a trigger point.
- **Stress and anxiety.** Stress and anxiety frequently cause people to clench their muscles. This repeated strain in the muscles can lead to trigger points.

What Is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is also a chronic pain disorder that causes pain all over the body, among a variety of other troublesome symptoms.

It is believed that fibromyalgia affects the way the brain interprets signals from the body. It is also thought to cause an increase in neurotransmitters, making the brain think that it is in pain when it shouldn't be.

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

Many possible symptoms and companion illnesses are associated with fibromyalgia. Some of the most common symptoms of fibromyalgia are:

- Persistent pain throughout the body
- Fatigue
- Cognitive fatigue
- Joint stiffness
- Muscle stiffness and spasms
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety, depression, or mood swings
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Causes of Fibromyalgia

- Genetics
- Certain infections
- Autoimmune disorders
- Injury or physical trauma
- Emotional trauma

Fibromyalgia vs. Myofascial Pain Syndrome

While both myofascial pain syndrome and fibromyalgia do have some common symptoms, there are differences in the two illnesses.

Myofascial Pain Syndrome vs. Fibromyalgia Diagnosis

To diagnose myofascial pain syndrome, your doctor will do a physical exam. They will apply pressure to the painful, tense area. They will look at how your body responds to the pressure on the trigger point.

Your doctor will likely recommend other testing and procedures to rule out any other potential causes of muscle pain.

To diagnose fibromyalgia, your doctor will look at all your symptoms, do blood work to rule out other possible causes for the symptoms, and perform a physical exam. The diagnostic criteria that doctors consider include:

- Widespread pain that lasts for at least three months
- Accompanied with other symptoms such as fatigue, waking up tired, and mental fogginess
- No other underlying condition that could explain the symptoms

Myofascial Pain Syndrome vs. Fibromyalgia Treatments

Treating myofascial pain syndrome usually requires a mix of more than one method of treatment.

- **Medication.** Pain relievers, such as over-the-counter pain relievers may help some. Or some doctors may prescribe some stronger pain relievers. There are a number of antidepressants that may help to relieve pain and improve sleep for those with MPS. In some cases, sedatives may be prescribed to some with

MPS to help treat anxiety and difficulty sleeping.

- **Therapy.** A physical therapist may use a combination of gentle stretching exercises, posture training, massage, and heat to help relieve muscle pain, as well as tension. Ultrasound therapy uses sound waves to help promote healing in the muscles.
- **Trigger point injections.** A numbing agent or steroids may be injected into a trigger point to help relieve pain. For some, dry needling may help to break up muscle tension. This is when a needle is inserted into the trigger point, as well as several paces around it. Acupuncture has also been helpful for some that have myofascial pain syndrome.

There are a number of methods that have been used to treat fibromyalgia symptoms. In most cases, it requires finding the right combination of treatments to best help each individual. Some of the most common treatments for fibromyalgia:

- **Medication.** Both prescription and over the counter pain medications may help. Some antidepressants and seizure medications have been successful in lessening the pain of fibro for some. Muscle relaxers may also be used to reduce muscle stiffness and improve sleep.
- **Vitamins and Supplements.** Many have found relief from some of their symptoms when they take a supplement for Vitamin D, magnesium, or potassium. Some have also benefited from taking 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) and S-Adenosyl-L-methionine (SAMe).
- **Exercise.** Low impact exercise is necessary to successfully treat fibromyalgia, such as gentle stretching exercises, resistance training, or water aerobics.
- **Lifestyle Changes.** Learning to pace your activities is an absolutely vital key to successfully living with fibromyalgia. Take steps to improve your sleep habits. Reduce stress and learn methods to better cope with stress as it occurs.
- **Alternative treatments.** Acupuncture, massage, and chiropractic care have all been helpful for some.

Finding Answers to Chronic Pain

If you are living with chronic pain, finding answers is vital to being able to treat it. For some, an overlap in conditions may make getting those answers a little more difficult, but it is only by treating everything that is affecting you that you will be able to find relief.