How to Identify and Manage the Different Kinds of Fibro Chronic Pain

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Managing Fibromyalgia Chronic Pain

Stimulus and pain travel through the peripheral nervous system (which looks like a tree). These contain sensory and motor nerve endings all over our body. They are connected to the central nervous system (CNS), which includes the spine and brain. Signals fed through these systems, are then sent back through the same way. The nervous system is what is affected when someone is diagnosed with fibromyalgia and managing fibromyalgia chronic pain can be difficult.

Once the central nervous system has processed the pain, our body activates the best solution to protect the affected area and it then reacts. For example, our CNS can tell the difference between a pinprick and a heavy object dropped on your toe. Your internal systems work together to protect and heal areas of the body experiencing pain. This takes a complex set of processes.

How Are Pain and Fibromyalgia Related?

Fibromyalgia causes pain in different ways. There is still debate as to how this works and why. The consensus is that pain is amplified by a “glitch” in the way the body processes pain. The term is called hyperalgesia. “Hyper" means excess and "algesia" means pain.

According to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), people who suffer from fibromyalgia tend to have a reduced blood flow compared to person who does not suffer from this health condition. Blood flow helps your body deal with pain when it experiences it, so this could be why people who experience fibromyalgia have a more difficult time coping with chronic pain.

What Are the Two Forms of Pain?

There are two types of pain when it comes to fibromyalgia: acute and chronic.

Acute pain is short lasting, possibly a few weeks. For example, a pulled muscle from lifting a heavy object. This runs its course and can quickly resolve itself.

Chronic pain is longer lasting. When acute pain turns chronic, this can affect the body in other ways, such as mood disorders, muscle pain, fatigue and depression, among others.

Different Types of Chronic Pain

This list is not exhaustive, and it is not a one size fits all. Some of you may have these types of pain and some may not.

Total Body Muscle Pain

This tends to feel like having the flu. Your body aches and throbs and your skin can feel prickly (somatic pain). I often get this when suffering from fatigue.

Allodynia

This term is used to describe pain from even the lightest of touch. I get this often, during flare-ups and it can be severe enough for my clothes to feel uncomfortable.

Joint Pain

Hot spots are often in the jaw, head and neck. This is known as temporomandibular joint (TMJ). Also, the shoulders, lower back, hip and various other joints can be affected as well.

Neuropathic Pain

This comprises of odd nerve sensations that resemble crawling, tingling, burning, itching or numbness. I find that this pain is often the most difficult to treat. Even with the strongest of medications and home remedies, I have found treatment to be unsuccessful.

Headaches and Migraines

Pains in the head can feel more severe, often lasting longer. I have found even the smallest of headaches often turn into migraines since developing fibromyalgia. The head can throb, and tension pain can often appear anywhere on the head, even all over the face.

Abdominal Pain

The abdomen is not left out when it comes to fibromyalgia chronic pain. Gas, bloating, diarrhea, stomach cramps and constipation can occur. I have also found that menstrual pain is elevated too.

Increased Pain of Other Conditions

My fibromyalgia is secondary to my osteoarthritis and has severely ramped-up my arthritic pain. I am sure that many of you have noticed that any condition you have may feel more severe if you have fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia Triggers to Avoid

I have found that keeping a diary of symptoms, along with a log of food and activities, has helped pinpoint a number of things that have caused additional pain levels. I try to avoid the following:

- Stress. If you cannot avoid stress, then learn ways to positively deal with it. Yoga, meditation, positive thinking and affirmations are my favorites.
- Food triggers. If you can diarize which foods and drinks potentially flare-up your pain, then slowly eliminate these for a period of three months and reintroduce them one by one. Or, if you can avoid them completely, that is even better.
- Environmental triggers. Pollution, allergies, loud noise and smells have increased my pain levels. Avoidance or minimized exposure works best.
- Illness. Try to avoid people with colds and the flu. Quite often, even a basic cold can put me in bed for a week or two.
- Exercise. With post exercise, the lactic acid pain can be extreme. Start small and gentle and avoid anything that pushes you too hard.
- Immobility. Resting most of the day can cause the muscles to atrophy, which can create more pain, weakness and disability. My pain is actually worse if I do not get up and stretch every hour.
- Overdoing things. We all have those days when we feel we can do more that we should, and we end up crashing with fatigue. Learn to pace yourself with a diary and list.

Unhealthy interactions. Certain associations may cause more stress than they are worth and this can lead to more widespread pain. Your time is precious, so try to avoid toxic situations.
- Flare-ups. Inadvertently causing symptoms to flare-up can increase pain. Manage the list above to try to reduce these.

How Can You Reduce Your Pain Levels?

Research shows that reduced stress helps the body to process pain better. I now understand how my body reacts to my environment and how it helps me to manage my pain better.

There are a few remedies you can try:

- Over the counter or prescription painkillers
- Hot and cold compresses
- Hot baths and showers
- Hot tubs
- Infra red lamps
- Professional massage
- Home massage machines (shiatsu)
- Acupuncture and reflexology
- Distraction techniques, such as watching TV, going for a walk, reading or listening to music

COVID-19 and Fibromyalgia

I understand that you may be worried about the recent pandemic and the impact it has on fibromyalgia. There are no reports that fibromyalgia makes you more susceptible to catching the virus.

As mentioned above, having any cold type of illness with fibromyalgia can increase some of the types of fibromyalgia pain and can increase fatigue. The best advice I can give you is to follow the government’s guidelines: stay at home as much as possible, keep away from people outside of your household and practice good hand washing hygiene. If you do develop COVID-19 symptoms, please contact your medical provider for further instructions. Stay safe everyone.