Have You Heard of the FM/a Test? It Could Confirm Your Suspected Fibromyalgia

by AFRA WILLMORE

Can the FM/a Test Diagnose Fibromyalgia?

Getting a firm diagnosis of fibromyalgia can be notoriously difficult. Most doctors use a combination of elimination, case history and an 18-point touch sensitivity test to come to a final decision. Now, there is an FM/a test.

What Can a Fibromyalgia Diagnosis Be Like?

The whole process can take months or even years. The diagnosis can be stressful and unsatisfactory for those who would prefer a more definitive answer without having to jump through so many hoops.

My own story started soon after the traumatic birth of my now 14-year-old daughter. It took a number of blood tests, visits to my doctor and finally, a private consultation with a rheumatologist in Cyprus before I got a diagnosis. My diagnosis was based on my own anecdotal report and a positive tender points test.

What Is the FM/a Test?

Wouldn't it be so much quicker and easier if there was a simple blood test that can identify fibromyalgia?

Actually, there is such a test called the FM/a test developed by a private Los Angeles-based biomedical company, EpicGenetics Inc. They claim to be a "quick, accurate and definitive test for fibromyalgia."

Their website states "The FM/a® Test is a Laboratory-Developed Test (LDT) that was created — and is performed — in a CLIA certified laboratory. The test complies with FDA regulation (21CFR 866.5700) for a serum immunological test system and is covered by Medicare and most insurance companies."

How Was the FM/a Test Created?

The test was developed following a clinical scientific study carried out by researchers at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago.

Subsequently, Rheumatologist Professor Daniel Wallace from the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA led a research team in a study of immune system biomarkers. The study surrounded 500 participants in reference to fibromyalgia. Those results reconfirmed and the original group's findings were published in a peer-reviewed medical journal, which is available at Rheumatology International.

To put it simply, the research demonstrated that the fibromyalgia biomarkers that make up the FM/a® test do not normally occur in other rheumatic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

What Does the FM/a Test Do?

The FM/a test analyses chemokine and cytokine patterns within the immune system's white blood cells. When an irregular protein pattern is detected, fibromyalgia is indicated.

Test results are based upon a 1 to 100 scoring system, with fibromyalgia patients having scores higher than 50. The company claims their FM/a test is almost 99% accurate at detecting fibromyalgia.

How and Where Can I Get the FM/a Test?

Since it became available in 2012, the FM/a test has become widely available across the U.S., as well as in Canada, some European countries, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

Anyone wishing to take the test must confirm they have experienced or are experiencing at least four fibromyalgia symptoms. People then need to get authorization from their healthcare provider who will then disclose what fibromyalgia medications the patient is taking, if any. These include anti-cancer drugs, steroids, medication relating to organ transplant and any drugs that affect the immune system.

Then, there's a short application form to complete. After that, an arrangement will be made to pay the test fee (currently around $1,000) privately or via insurance.

Does Medicare Cover the FM/a Test?

EpicGenetics claims that Medicare and many other insurance companies, including many HMOs, will cover the cost of the test. During your application they can check if your insurance will cover the test cost.

You can arrange to visit a local center to get blood drawn, or in some states, EpiGenetics can arrange for someone to visit you in your own home to draw blood.

Pros and Cons of Getting Tested

Well, a positive thing about being tested would be finally getting a more formal diagnosis, especially if you have been waiting a while for one. It may help your work and family life as well.

However, despite the potential relief from finding out what is causing your symptoms, sometimes getting a diagnosis can cause stress, anxiety and even a sense of grief.

I know when I was diagnosed, I felt initial relief that it was not another potentially life limiting condition.

However, once I looked into the prognosis for fibromyalgia, I felt a mixture of sadness, panic and anger about the fact that my lifestyle could potentially be significantly compromised for the rest of my life.

That initial shock reaction has settled over the years into an acceptance of my limitations and a determination to live my life as fully as possible despite the pain, exhaustion and brain fog. Fibromyalgia is still my constant companion but no longer my worst enemy.

Consider what a diagnosis will mean to you before going ahead with a test. Will it change anything? Will it make a practical difference? Will it give you some personal closure? Only you know whether that diagnosis will make a significant difference to your life.