What Are the Treatment Options Available for Fibromyalgia?

by ADRIEL MALDONADO

What Are Your Fibromyalgia Treatment Options?

Fibromyalgia is a very common condition that has been considered a sort of mystery by doctors and researchers for over a hundred years.

Slowly over time more and more is being understood about this illness that causes multiple types of pain throughout the body, muscle stiffness, fatigue, brain fog, sensitivity to lights, sounds, cold, and heat, sleep disorders, and a long list of other symptoms and companion illnesses.

While the exact cause of fibromyalgia is still a mystery, there is a reason to believe there is a genetic component to the disorder. Some viruses and illnesses make a person more likely to develop fibromyalgia. It has also been seen that physical and emotional trauma are common triggers for fibromyalgia.

In all the research that has been done about this mysterious illness, one question that keeps arising is, how do you best treat an illness that you don't really understand? The primary method that is currently used is to treat the symptoms of fibromyalgia as well as finding ways to improve the individual's overall quality to life.

It is absolutely vital that we acknowledge that there is no magic cure for fibromyalgia. As of now, no pill, treatment, diet, or exercise will completely get rid of fibromyalgia. If someone tells you that there is, they are mostly either lying to you, or they don't fully understand what fibromyalgia is.

But please do not despair! There are many options to lessen the impact that fibromyalgia has on your life. With some time and patience, you will hopefully find the right combination of things to help you to live your best life possible.

These fibromyalgia treatment options range from taking medication, making lifestyle and dietary changes and utilizing alternative treatments to help manage fibromyalgia as a whole and the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Medications to Treat Fibromyalgia

The first line of defense that most doctors employ is medication to reduce your fibromyalgia-related pain and/or improve the quality and amount of sleep you get. There are a few medications that may be used for these purposes.

Some medication can bring a lot of relief for some people. But not all medication has the same effect on each person that takes it. There is also a risk of side effects with any medication that you take.

Some medications that your doctor may suggest or prescribe:

- **Over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers.** Acetaminophen (Tylenol; Excedrin; others); ibuprofen (Advil;

Motrin; others); naproxen sodium (Aleve; others). These OTC pain medications may help reduce the amount of pain you have, but many with fibro report getting little to no relief at all. It is also important to remember these medications can have harmful side effects, especially if they are not taken properly or with prolonged use.

- **Prescription pain relievers.** There are prescription strength pain relievers that some doctors may prescribe to fibro patients. But many doctors are hesitant to do so, as there is a chance some may become dependent on them. Also, of concern, are the number of side effects associated with pain medication, especially with prolonged and regular use. Prolonged use of pain medication can also lead to building up a tolerance to the medication, rendering it ineffective.
- **Antidepressants.** Duloxetine (Cymbalta); milnacipran (Savella); amitriptyline (Elavil); and venlafaxine (Effexor) are antidepressants that have been helpful with lessening pain and fatigue or improving quality of sleep for some with fibromyalgia.
- **Muscle Relaxers.** Some doctors may prescribe a muscle relaxant, such as cyclobenzaprine (Amrix; Fexmid; or Flexeril) to help reduce muscle stiffness and help you to fall asleep.
- **Anti-seizure medication.** Some medication that is specifically intended for epilepsy can also help decrease certain types of pain. Pregabalin (Lyrica) and gabapentin (Neurontin) have been found to help calm overactive nerves, thereby reducing pain for some with fibro.

Vitamins and Supplements to Treat Fibromyalgia

Many with fibromyalgia also suffer with a variety of vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Finding what you are deficient in and taking supplements or adding them into your diet can greatly improve some of your symptoms.

There are also a number of natural supplements that may help improve your pain levels or help you to sleep better.

Even when taking something that is natural though, there is a possibility of negative side effects. It is good to talk with your doctor and do research, to confirm that what you are wanting to try doesn't interfere with any medications you are on, and to ensure you are taking the right dosage.

- **Vitamin D.** Deficiencies in vitamin D are very common. Vitamin D works to help the body maintain muscle strength and reduce inflammation. Taking a Vitamin D3 supplement can improve many symptoms of fibro; including pain, fatigue, and cognitive fatigue (brain fog).
- **Magnesium.** It is common for someone with fibromyalgia to have a magnesium deficiency. A magnesium deficiency can lead to muscle twitching and cramps, mental disorders, as well as fatigue and muscle weakness. Taking a magnesium citrate supplement or adding magnesium-rich foods into your diet can help with your pain levels, with the quality of your sleep, anxiety, and depression.
- **5-HTP.** 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) is an amino acid that the body produces naturally. Taking a 5-HTP supplement will increase the amount of serotonin your body produces. It is thought that serotonin can help improve fibromyalgia symptoms; including pain, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and depression.
- **SAM-e.** S-Adenosyl-L-methionine (SAMe) is a naturally occurring chemical in our bodies, made from an amino acid. It is believed that SAMe can improve pain levels, stiffness, and tender points, as well as improving quality of sleep and lessening depression.
- **Potassium.** Low potassium levels can cause muscle spasms, cramping, and stiffness. Low potassium can also contribute to anxiety and depression. Adding potassium-rich foods to your diet, or taking a potassium supplement, may help to improve some of your pain and mood-related fibro symptoms.
- **Natural sleep aids.** There are a variety of sleep aids on the market, made from all-natural supplements. While there are several out there, one that I personally have tried is Somnapure. Somnapure combines melatonin; L-Theanine; valerian extract; hops extract; lemon balm; chamomile flower; and passion flower. I have found this to help me fall asleep faster and wake up more rested in the morning. And thanks to the better night's rest, I have also seen improvement in my pain levels, fatigue, brain fog, and my mood.

Next page: Lifestyle changes and dietary changes for fibromyalgia treatment.

Lifestyle Changes for Fibromyalgia

One of the most helpful things someone with fibromyalgia can do to improve symptoms and their quality of life is to make changes to their everyday life. Admittedly, this can be difficult to do, but making these changes are necessary for living the best life possible with fibromyalgia.

- **Pace your activities.** Balance is truly key. It is important to learn what your personal limits are and try to stay within your boundaries. Even on good days, schedule regular periods of rest throughout the day. On bad days, take it slow, but try to avoid doing nothing at all, as a complete lack of activity can ultimately make pain worse.
- **Exercise.** It can be very difficult to exercise when you have chronic pain and fatigue. But exercising on a regular basis will help improve your symptoms and quality of life.

Try gentle stretches first, and slowly work your way up. Many swear by the benefits they have found doing yoga, Pilates, or tai chi for fibro. Strength training has also been proven to be beneficial for people with fibromyalgia, just make sure you start slowly and take necessary precautions.

- **Improve sleep habits.** Sleep is a vital component to feeling your best with fibromyalgia. Unfortunately, sleep disturbances are commonly associated with fibro. To help your body get the best quality of sleep possible, you must practice good sleep habits.

Try to wake up and go to bed at the same time every day, or within a 30-minute period. Use aromatherapy to help your body to relax. For example, lavender essential oils help the mind and body relax, allowing you to go to sleep faster and have a better quality of sleep.

Reduce the amount of caffeine that you intake each day and have a caffeine cut off point. Set a time each evening to start winding down, dim the lights, turn off the electronics, do something relaxing like read or color, take a relaxing bath, practice some breathing exercises. This will help to prepare your mind for bedtime.

- **Reduced stress.** While this is obviously easier said than done, finding ways to reduce stress can be extremely beneficial for improving fibromyalgia symptoms.

Here are a few suggestions to help reduce and successfully cope with stress: Take time each day to relax, even if it is as little as five minutes. Say no when you need to, without feeling guilty.

Do deep-breathing exercises, or practice mindfulness. There are a number of mobile apps, as well as online videos that can help to guide you through relaxing breathing exercises.

Take time to do things that you enjoy on a regular basis, things you ‘want’ to do, not just things you ‘need’ to do. Take calming detox baths. Spend time in nature. Pray. Listen to your favorite calming music, or to nature sounds. Do something creative. Journal your thoughts and feelings. Have a gratitude journal.

Therapy for Fibromyalgia

There are a variety of therapies that could potentially be beneficial for someone with fibromyalgia.

- **Physical Therapy (PT)** may help you increase your strength, flexibility, as well as energy through exercises. PT can also work to help you look at ways to improve your situation. Many with fibromyalgia have found water aerobics effective for improving fibromyalgia symptoms.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** is a form of psychotherapy that can be beneficial for both mental health problems and some chronic physical illnesses. This form of therapy can help you to cope better with stress, which will, in turn, lessen some fibro symptoms.

A therapist may also help you to get better sleep, which in turn will greatly improve your symptoms and overall wellbeing. CBT may be especially beneficial for those that have developed fibromyalgia after experiencing

emotional trauma, as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD).

- **Occupational Therapy (OT)** can help you learn how to perform your everyday activities in a way that will cause you less pain, such as making adjustments to your work area or your home.

Dietary Changes for Fibromyalgia

There are a number of diet changes that can help to reduce fibromyalgia symptoms. When looking at what you eat, one of the best things that you can do is to primarily eat real, whole foods, like fruit, veggies, whole grains, beans, and nuts.

It is also greatly beneficial to add foods to your diet that include vitamins and minerals you personally are deficient in. You may also look to include more foods that naturally reduce inflammation and pain, such as:

- Leafy greens, like spinach, kale, and broccoli
- Fruits and veggies high in antioxidants, like celery, beets, and blueberries
- Pineapples
- Red and purple fruits, like cherries and strawberries
- Beans
- Nuts and seeds
- Healthy fats, like olive oil, coconut oil, and avocados
- Omega-3 fatty acids, found in walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds, and oily fish
- Green tea
- Garlic
- Turmeric
- Ginger

Next page: More dietary changes information, and alternative fibromyalgia treatment options worth looking into.

Dietary Changes for Fibromyalgia

It is also suggested that you remove, or at least greatly reduce, the foods that increase inflammation or that you personally have an allergy or sensitivity to. Some foods that are frequently found to be problematic for people with fibro are:

- Chemical additives and preservatives
- Artificial sweeteners
- Gluten
- Dairy
- Refined sugar
- Partially hydrogenated oils

Alternative Treatments for Fibromyalgia

There are a number of alternative treatments that have been helpful for some with fibromyalgia, but as with many things, success will vary from person to person. Another issue many face, is that most alternative treatments are not covered by insurance providers and may be too expensive for a limited budget.

- **Heat and/or cold therapy.** Many have found using heat on their sore aching body has been very soothing. Others prefer using cold to help numb and relieve pain. Some may use a combination of the two, rotating from heat to cold as needed. Hot water bottles, heating pads, and heated blankets are useful for providing needed heat. A variety of ice packs can be found, or you can use items you already have to make your own for cooling relief.

- **Acupuncture.** Using very small needles, acupuncture can cause a change in your blood flow and your levels of neurotransmitters. Acupuncture has been found to help many with pain, anxiety, and other symptoms of fibromyalgia.
- **Massage therapy.** Massage can help to relax the muscles, improve joint mobility, and lessen pain for some with fibromyalgia. Massage therapy can also be beneficial for relieving stress and anxiety.
- **Chiropractic care.** A chiropractor can help make adjustments to your spine and skeletal structure. These adjustments can bring relief from both pain and stiffness.
- **Manual Lymph Drainage Therapy.** Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) works to flush lymph fluid that may be built up in certain spots of the body. Helping the body eliminate toxins and waste, MLD has been helpful for some by relieving pain, stiffness, and improving sleep.
- **Biofeedback.** There is potential for Biofeedback to be helpful for relieving some of the symptoms of fibro. According to Christopher Camilleri, DO, of Holtorf Medical Group in Foster City, Calif, “A biofeedback machine uses lights and beeps to get you to recognize your body’s reactions to stress, such as rapid heartbeat, joint pain, and heavy breathing, and thus control and lessen them.”

What Fibromyalgia Treatment Will Help You?

If reading this makes you feel overwhelmed, you are not alone. Deciding which treatment to try first, or next, can be difficult. But it is important to start somewhere. Over time you will likely find some things that do work for you, and other things that don’t work for you.

You will also find in the course of treating fibromyalgia, that there are many differing opinions about how you should be treating your illness. But we must all keep in mind that everyone is different, fibromyalgia can vary from person to person, as can personal circumstances.

This is your life; this is your illness, this is your journey. It is up to you to decide what is right for you. It is up to you to find what works for you. But be assured you can find something that will help and that will make this challenging life with fibromyalgia a little easier and little better.