Using Herbs for Fibromyalgia Treatment

by STARLA RICH

The Natural Approach: Herbs for Fibromyalgia Symptoms

If you are like most of those dealing with the complex symptoms of fibromyalgia, you have probably tried numerous prescription medications as well as recommended supplements to ease your symptoms.

For me, I think I've tried every known medication on the market: some specifically for fibromyalgia, others traditionally for depression, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, chronic pain and everything in between. I have also tried various over-the-counter supplements over the years.

Physicians differ in their opinion and approach, but do all they can to try to reduce the pain, fatigue, brain fog, and other symptoms their patients chronically deal with.

My experience has been that while many of these medications and supplements provide initial relief, they diminish in their effectiveness over time as my body simply becomes immune to their benefits. This has caused me to change medications frequently or simply quit them altogether.

I suspect many of you have had similar experiences. Given the long-term possible damage certain drugs can do to your body, or even the short term side effects, it can be a gamble regarding prescription medications.

Given the odds, many physicians and their patients seek alternative methods towards relief and reduction of symptoms. Natural herbs are becoming increasingly popular among those dealing with chronic pain and fatigue.

Types of Herbs

Just like medications, herbs are specific in nature — targeting various symptoms. For the purpose of this discussion, let's break down herbal remedies in five categories:

Sedative Herbs

Fibromyalgia can be seen as a chronic sleep disorder. Relaxing herbal remedies that promote sleep can be used to achieve deep and restful sleep throughout the night.

Not all sedative herbs work the same way for everyone; the constitution of the person and the energetics of the herbs need to be taken into consideration.

Adaptogen Herbs

Adaptogens support the body's resiliency to stress. One way to think about adaptogens is deep nourishment and support for the nervous system.

Some adaptogens, like Withania somnifera, promote sleep at night and energy throughout the daytime, which is crucial for people with this condition.

Anodyne Herbs

Anodyne herbs can help reduce the pain and discomfort fibro causes.

Carminative Herbs

Carminative herbs promote digestion and can be an important part of healing a leaky gut, which is often a factor when dealing with fibromyalgia.

Immunomodulating Herbs

Immunomodulating herbs gently, yet effectively, support a person's immune system. They are frequently used for people with immune system concerns such as autoimmunity, frequent colds and flu, and seasonal allergies.

Herbs 101

There are a few basics to be remembered when considering herbal remedies as an alternative to traditional medicines when treating the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

A Marathon, Not a Sprint

One thing that is vitally important to the true test of success when using natural herbal alternatives is understanding that they work at a slower pace than prescription drugs, so be patient in order to realize the results.

Next page: which herbs can best help your fibromyalgia symptoms?

Herbs 101

Not a Nutritional Supplement

Although herbs do contain nutrients, make sure you get your basic nutritional needs met first. For instance, make sure you have enough good oils in your diet before trying to target certain symptoms with fibromyalgia herbs.

If your body is not able to function correctly because of nutritional deficiencies, herbs may not help as much. Many who deal with fibromyalgia also deal with vitamin deficiencies such as vitamin D and vitamin B-12. Make sure your doctor keeps an eye on these essential vitamins.

Time Restraints

Herbs are different than vitamins in that some of them are not meant to be taken indefinitely. Normally, fibromyalgia herbs will be taken for the period of one to four months, until the symptoms targeted improve.

Some herbs act more immediately, like the relaxing effects of chamomile. Some herbs can be taken for extensive periods in order to guard against future problems. Milk thistle and saw palmetto are two examples of herbs used safely long-term.

Consider Herbs a Drug

Take them with care. Check with your doctor or an herbalist before mixing fibromyalgia herbs and medications. Some herbs may not combine well with medications that are hard on your liver or if the herb acts in the same way as a medication you are taking.

Use With Caution

Many fibromyalgia herbs can help various ailments. Some of them can be quite potent and dangerous. Always be careful about the amount and frequency of herbs taken for relief of symptoms.

Not All Herbs Are Equal

Make sure you do adequate research on the manufacturer of the herbs you choose. Just because the label states they are safe and effective doesn't make it so.

Validate their research standards, history of safety, purity and effectiveness. This is vitally important as the FDA does not regulate herbs or any supplements. You have to be sure everything has been tested before it gets to you.

Drill Down on Herbs

Just like prescription medications, there is a huge variety of natural remedies on the market. Below are some of the herbs used to treat the various symptoms of fibromyalgia, pain, fatigue and sleep disorders, as well as other conditions that are exasperated by fibromyalgia.

- **Chamomile:** This is a calming fibromyalgia herb can help induce sleep, lessen anxiety, decrease menstrual cramps, and may even boost the immune system.
- **Echinacea:** Supports the immune system and may help prevent infections. Take at the first sign of a cold to boost your immune system.
- **Cayenne:** Can help relieve migraine or tension headaches. It is used for muscle pain when made into a salve or ointment.
- **Ginger:** Can be used to calm an upset stomach. May have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects.
- **Ginseng:** Increases energy and relieves stress. It is important to look for Panax ginseng with ginsenocides of around 10 percent for a quality supplement. Be aware! Studies show that some ginseng extract actually allows very little to be absorbed by your system in order to get results. Consult your doctor because there are contraindications where you do not want to take this herb.
- **Goldenseal:** Can reduce inflammation and is also used to detoxify. Not recommended for long-term use. One week to one month is the recommendation.
- **Grape seed extract:** The oil in the seeds of wine grapes contains powerful antioxidants and natural anti-inflammatory compounds called procyanidins. They may help to inhibit the inflammatory response, which is responsible for muscle pain and soreness in some people.
- **Lavender:** Relieves insomnia, depression, and can help with headaches. Generally, this scent is inhaled to give the benefits of aromatherapy.
- **Licorice:** Supports the adrenal glands, aids in digestion, and can act as a sexual stimulant.

Next page: herb combinations to take your treatment to the next level

Drill Down on Herbs

- **Pine bark:** Reduces inflammation and can help with circulation.
- **Milk thistle:** Supports the liver and aids in its regeneration, thus improving the immune system and hormone production.
- **Passionflower:** Helps with insomnia, stress and anxiety.
- **Dong quai:** Can be effective in regulating female problems related to the menstrual cycle. Do not use if you are or may become pregnant; it can cause the uterus to contract, triggering a miscarriage.
- **Saw palmetto:** Can help men with urinary flow problems.
- **St. John's wort:** Can be as effective for some as Prozac for treating mild depression without as many side effects. It is not recommended for major depression, but can help lift your mood effectively if mild depression is your problem. There is increased risk of skin damage when exposed to the sun, so use lots

of sunscreen when taking this. **Do not combine St. John's Wort with any antidepressant medications**.

Herbal Combinations

Fibromyalgia herbs can sometimes be combined with other herbs and key nutrients to be very effective in treating various conditions:

- **Ginkgo, bilberry hawthorn and B-vitamins** can improve memory and the ability to make decisions.
- **Black cohosh, flaxseed, and soy isoflavones** can help with menopausal symptoms if low estrogen is your problem. May help balance all hormones.
- **Saw Palmetto combined with pumpkin seed oil and phytosterols** can be more effective in supporting prostate health than saw palmetto by itself.
- **Milk thistle, turmeric, dandelion with reishi mushroom** can support liver health more than milk thistle alone.
- **Boswellia with safflower extract** can help with pain relief without the adverse side effects of other pain relievers.
- **Echinacea, black elderberry, larch tree and zinc** combined all support a healthy immune response when you feel cold symptoms coming on.
- **Ginger and licorice** together can better help calm an upset stomach.
- **Lavender combined with vanilla** can promote a deeper sleep through their aromas.
- **Valerian, chamomile, and passionflower** in combination can be more effective than valerian alone for improved sleep.

Taking Control

Each person must find the best regime for their individual fibromyalgia symptoms. The best medicine is what you put into your body before trying any medications at all: food.

Consider food a medicine. Don’t live to eat, but eat to live! Proper diet goes a long way towards improved health. The old cliché is quite true: you are what you eat.

Before trying any of the recommended herbs and natural remedies and supplements, take control of your diet and eating habits. Certain foods are natural toxins to the body and even more so to those dealing with chronic pain and fatigue.

Treat your body with care and respect. If you eat well, develop discipline in sleep habits and do all that is possible to avoid stress, then you should receive optimal results from natural herbal alternatives.