Fibromyalgia Symptoms in Women: Pain During Your Cycle

by ANGELA FINLAY

How to Correct Pain Fluctuations During Your Cycle

Unfortunately, a high percentage of women with fibromyalgia report heavier and more painful periods, and for many years doctors have been unable to point to a source or an effective solution. However, recent studies have shed some light on the connection between fibro pain and the menstrual cycle and, armed with this understanding, you have a better chance of resolving your discomfort when it hits.

The Connection Between Hormones and Flare-ups

Although it's not clear whether menstruation can actually cause flare-ups, more experts are turning their attention to the hormones released at various points in each woman's cycle for clues to explain the fluctuations in pain, aches and fatigue that contribute to usual fibro symptoms.

- **Ovulation:** Estrogen is a pain suppressor, but it doesn't necessarily lead to less pain for everyone. When the lining of the uterus begins to thicken in preparation for a possible pregnancy, estrogen peaks but the brain also releases several other hormones, including some which may trigger fibromyalgia symptoms.
- **Days leading up to the period:** Your estrogen level is at its lowest right before you begin to menstruate and continues over the next few days. This explains why many women (fibro sufferers and others) feel more sensitive to pain in general before and during their period.
- **Days following the period:** Many women report that their fibro pain lessens as their period finishes, perhaps because there are fewer hormonal triggers to exacerbate the consistent muscle aches and tender points common to fibromyalgia.

Although many women share the same sort of symptoms, ovulation may bring on problems for certain women, while other women find that their fibro reacts more in other phases of their cycle. In the end, there seems to be a definite link between hormones and fibro pain; the problem is that relationship isn't universal.

How Women Can Improve Symptoms Each Month

Just as there is no universal link, there is no universal solution for these menstrual symptoms that women with fibromyalgia experience. However, you're not without options:

Increase the Level and Frequency of Exercise

Regular exercise is one of the best ways to reduce menstrual pain, and it can help when you suffer from fibromyalgia, too. Exercise triggers the release of beta-endorphins, natural pain relievers that also help to eradicate the prostaglandins that are responsible for painful muscle contractions during menstruation.

Consider the Birth Control Pill

It’s not for everyone, but the birth control pill may help to curb severe period pain when taken consistently. The pills keep estrogen levels elevated throughout the month, and some studies have shown that women who take an estrogen-based birth control pill experience fewer symptoms.

Of course, there are well-known side effects, so you should carefully weigh the pros and cons with your doctor before choosing to introduce an oral contraceptive to your pain relief plan.

Prevent the Pain With Surgery

If you suffer more pain during ovulation, you may benefit from a procedure called endometrial ablation: by cauterizing the uterine lining, it’s unable to thicken with blood, which would drastically lighten your period and eradicate the suspect hormones.

While you might experience painful days, in many cases, fibromyalgia symptoms in women fall away along with menstrual symptoms, so the week after your period ends is relatively calm and comfortable. Make use of that time to get yourself on a healthy track by starting up a new exercise routine, tweaking your diet for more energy, and working with your massage therapist or physical therapist to find the most relaxing and relieving techniques to use when the pain strikes.