Does Fibromyalgia Cause Skin Issues?

by ADRIEL MALDONADO

Coping With Fibromyalgia Skin Problems

Fibromyalgia brings many unpleasant symptoms with it, the primary ones being a feeling of widespread pain, physical fatigue, and cognitive fatigue–also known as brain fog. But did you know that fibromyalgia could also be to blame for rashes, itching, and other skin conditions?

It has been estimated that between 50 to 80 percent of people that have fibromyalgia also have problems with their skin. This means that in addition to living with intense pain and debilitating fatigue, many of us also deal with the extreme irritation of itchiness and rashes.

You may not think of itching as being of major concern. But if you have been woken in the middle of the night and not been able to sleep again because your whole-body itches with a ferocity that is difficult to put into words, you may change your tune.

Even if your own experience with skin conditions is not as extreme as that, we all have enough to deal with living with fibromyalgia; we certainly do not need more discomfort added to our plate.

So, the questions we need to answer are, what makes us more likely to develop rashes, have itchy skin, and other issues with our skin? And what can we do reduce their effect on our lives?

The Role of Mast Cells and Itching

The reason for our skin issues likely lies just under our skin itself. One research group found that people with fibromyalgia have four times the number of mast cells in the skin tissues than the average person.

The immune system produces mast cells which go to all of the tissues in the body. They contain histamine and other chemicals that are released to send signals to the brain. An increase of histamines can cause itching and skin irritation.

The Role of the Nervous System and Itching

We know that fibromyalgia pain is linked to our central nervous system. Our nervous system has heightened sensors that lead to an increased amount of pain.

These same overactive sensors that are translated as pain and itchiness. Put simply, our brain thinks it itches when it shouldn’t. A light touch or slight pressure can be misinterpreted as pain or as an itch.

Other Causes for Skin Problems

What has come to be known as ‘fibromyalgia rash’ is usually red, raised, and bumpy. It may be sore or itchy, as

well as cause crawling sensations in the skin.

Chemical sensitivities, or multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), can also be to blame for itchy skin and rashes.

Food sensitivities can also be a culprit behind some rashes and skin irritations.

There is also the issue of the ‘scratch-itch cycle.’ When our skin itches our initial reaction is to scratch it until we feel relieved. However, the more you scratch the skin, the more the skin itches and therefore creates a vicious cycle.

And not to be ignored is the fact that many of the medications for fibromyalgia symptoms may cause itchiness or rashes as a side effect.

What Can Be Done About Fibromyalgia Skin Problems?

Finding what will help you most may take a little time depending on what is causing the problem and what works best for you personally.

If you have a rash, it is best to consult a doctor or nurse, especially if you suspect it is a side effect of a medication. You may also want to see a dermatologist for any ongoing skin irritations.

Here are a few other suggestions to treat or limit itchiness and skin problems:

- **Use cold packs on itchy skin.** The application of a cold pack may help reduce overactive nerve endings. This will also help to avoid the scratch-itch cycle.
- **Take an antihistamine.** Antihistamines will help reduce your bodies unnecessary histamine production. Stinging nettle root is one form of natural antihistamines, or you can ask your doctor to recommend an antihistamine medication.
- **Limit contact with chemicals.** Switch to natural cleaning products, laundry detergent, soap, shampoo, lotion, deodorant, and makeup. Some of these products can even be made at home with a few ingredients. You can also look for products that are hypoallergenic or that are made especially for sensitive skin, primarily free of perfume and dyes.
- **Use lukewarm water when showering and bathing.** Hot water can cause the skin to dry out, making itching even worse.
- **Keep your skin moisturized.** Using a natural or fragrance-free moisturizer, especially after bathing, can prevent and treat dry, itchy skin. Also make sure you drink plenty of water and stay hydrated, as this can be key to preventing skin dryness.
- **Limit sun exposure.** Too much time in the sun can cause problems for the skin or make pre-existing conditions worse. When going out in the sun, wear sunscreen with a minimum of SPF 30. Try to avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are most intense.
- **Look for and avoid any food sensitivities.** Talk to your doctor or try an elimination diet to pinpoint any foods that could be affecting you.

I found relief using a combination of things, reducing my exposure to chemicals, avoiding food sensitivities, and taking stinging nettle root have almost eliminated my itching and skin irritation.

Living with itchy skin and rashes is challenging and very frustrating, but you can find relief!