

Fibromyalgia: **Have you really tried everything?**

Conventional medicine views disease in a linear fashion. In other words, 'one' cause leads to 'one' disease for which there is 'one' drug that treats it. This approach has proven miraculous in treating plagues, infections, and traumas. Unfortunately, when it comes to chronic disorders like fibromyalgia, this constricted approach yields meager results. Fibromyalgia is a multi-causal, multi-factorial complex that must be viewed from a more circular and global perspective. Imagine a Jigsaw puzzle where each piece is a 'cause' of fibromyalgia. There would be pieces with the following names: hormonal imbalances, hypoglycemia, adrenal fatigue, detoxification dysfunction, cellular energy deficit, low growth hormone, psychological disorders, stress, poor dietary choices and candida. All of these pieces contribute to the whole puzzle. The healthcare community must not narrow-mindedly mistaken any single piece as the sole cause. The best approach is to evaluate each 'piece' by a practitioner who can prioritize the imbalances. In this article, we will discuss a few of the evidence-based, natural substances and techniques that have been validated by medical studies.

Melatonin: This hormone is the conductor of the sleep/wake cycle of the body and mind. Our brains release this substance as the lights in our environment are dimming. Some of the earliest research on fibromyalgia in the 1970's proved that these patients displayed a measurable lack of deep, refreshing sleep. This monumental insight took fibromyalgia out of the realm of being merely a psychosomatic disorder. Besides lifestyle changes, proper sleep structure can be reinstated by taking melatonin. It can be safely supplemented. Of course with any recommendation, first ask your healthcare provider before beginning.

5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan): This amino acid derivative is the direct precursor to serotonin, a chemical in our bodies that plays a chief role in mood and pain perception. Numerous studies have evaluated 5-HTP and its effects on fibromyalgia. It has outperformed many of the commonly prescribed, pharmaceutical drugs for fibromyalgia, but without the plethora of side effects.

SAM-e (S-adenosylmethionine): In Europe, due to the fact that medicine is socialized, there exists motivation to find the most inexpensive, safe, and effective medicines. On that continent, SAM-e is used a first line drug for, both, depression and arthritis. It has triumphed in numerous head-to-head studies against various drugs. With fibromyalgia, SAM-e can increase the production of our own bodies' pain relieving chemicals. Being that there is a close kinship between chronic pain and depression, this natural substance conveniently targets both of these symptoms.

Magnesium/Malic Acid: In a 1995 study that appeared in the *Journal of Rheumatology*, this combination yielded exceptional results. Magnesium assists over 300 biochemical reactions within the body. This essential mineral plays a central role in sleep quality, pain perception, and energy production. When we realize that 80% of Americans do not consume sufficient amounts of magnesium through their diet, it is no wonder that our society is plagued by insomnia, fatigue, and chronic pain. Malic acid, naturally found in apples and other fruits, works with magnesium inside our cells to produce energy (ATP).

D-Ribose: This sugar molecule is new on the fibromyalgia scene, but the preliminary studies show that it is, both, safe and effective. D-ribose is an essential part of the energy production process that takes place constantly within every cell of our bodies. Much of the research has indicated that people with fibromyalgia have a dysfunction manufacturing sufficient amounts of energy on a cellular level. This causes our cellular engines to get “junked up”. D-ribose is needed in a steady supply to prevent this from occurring. Although our bodies can produce ribose, the demand is often greater than the supply. By taking D-ribose orally we greatly enhance this process. Diabetics need not worry. This sugar is metabolized in an entirely different way than glucose and therefore does not elevate blood sugar levels. As with any recommendation, always check with your healthcare provider before starting any new medicine.

Acupuncture: In existence for over 3000 years old, acupuncture is considered a primary care modality. Ancient China (as well as modern China) was an agricultural society. Within this system of medicine, they visualized canals of nourishment, similar to what existed throughout the countryside. These canals or meridians bring this nourishment from the Emperor’s Palace (the heart) to all of the cities and towns (the organs) in the kingdom. If any of these pathways become blocked or dammed up, then a person will experience pain and dysfunction. The acupuncture point is the lock and the strategically-placed needle is the key that can open these blockages, thereby providing relief while addressing the root problem. There have been five well designed studies evaluating the efficacy of acupuncture in regards to fibromyalgia. Most of these studies were extremely positive, achieving improvements in both pain and mood. However, buyer beware! The hallmark of Traditional Chinese Medicine is treating the individual as opposed to treating the disease. The studies confirm that it is important to visit an acupuncture physician that customizes the acupuncture treatments to fit each individual.

Laser: Some new and exciting research has “come to light” utilizing laser therapy for fibromyalgia. Lasers work by increasing the production of cellular energy which leads to normalization of cell function, pain relief and healing. With an incredibly small side effect profile, lasers make an excellent, non-invasive option.

There are certainly more techniques and substances to write about. A person with this condition should continue to search until they find the key that unlocks their unique constitutional door. Each day new studies are coming out giving us more pieces to the jigsaw puzzle of fibromyalgia. A concerted effort to integrate all of the theories is underway. The end result will be an elaborate tapestry of patterns and imbalances unique to each person. The practitioner of the future will design a protocol customized to suit a persons 'internal landscape'. What comes to mind is the validating expression often found in texts on Chinese Medicine that states, "same disease, different treatment". It is the "person who has a disorder" that should be treated and not "the disorder that has a person".

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