

# Solving the Puzzle of Fibromyalgia

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FEBRUARY 8, 2004 BY STEPHEN BYRNES, ND, RNCP  
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Fibromyalgia is a new name given to an old condition, one involving chronic inflammation of the muscles and the fibrous connective tissues that cushion the joints. Mostly affecting women, this disease is a complex web of symptoms with an even more perplexing set of possible causes. This disease presents a formidable challenge to affective individuals as well as practitioners who must be veritable detectives in ferreting out the multiple factors at play in the patient. Orthodox medicine has little to offer in the way of relief beyond prescription antidepressants and anti-inflammatories, but natural therapy can be immensely helpful.

The pains and symptoms of fibromyalgia have no known, discernible cause, but a number of theories have been put forward. Brain imbalances, chronic infection with *candida albicans* and other fungi, anemia, parasites (including protozoans like *giardia*), hypoglycemia, hypothyroidism, hepatitis, and heavy metal poisoning, including mercury toxicity from amalgam fillings, have all been proposed, either singly or in combination.

Fibromyalgia is very closely related to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), the main difference being that with CFS, the predominant symptom is fatigue; with fibromyalgia, it is pain. Fibromyalgia is a rheumatic disorder that most commonly affects the neck, lower back, shoulders, back of the head, upper thighs, elbows, buttocks, knees and the upper chest. It is important to remember, however, that the achy, burning pains of the disease can strike any part of the body. The pain and stiffness is typically worse in the morning and is often accompanied by insomnia, headaches, depression, brain fog, incoordination, digestive

disorders, dizziness, panic attacks and skin rashes. The immune system of an affected person is often hypersensitive and allergies to environmental and dietary factors are common. Symptoms can be aggravated by allergies, overexertion, lack of sleep and acute infections.

# NATURAL THERAPIES

Due to the multiple factors involved, each case needs to be approached differently and all causes need to be investigated. Healing a person with fibromyalgia is like peeling an onion: each layer removed reveals another obstacle to be dealt with. As with all effective therapy, the uniqueness of each individual case must be kept in mind.

## DIET

It is very common to see low-fat diets recommended for fibromyalgia. Saturated fats such as those found in coconut oil, butter, cream and other animal fats are strongly discouraged because it is believed that the arachidonic acid found in these fats converts into series two prostaglandins, which are involved in the inflammatory response. It is also believed that saturated fats interfere with circulation. Clinically, I have not found this to be true. While it is true that type two prostaglandins initiate the inflammatory response, they also regulate it. It is likewise untrue that saturated fats “clog” arteries and hamper circulation. What appears to be the problem is actually a lack of essential fatty acids along with an overabundance of *trans* fatty acids and damaged fats from processed vegetable oils, which will certainly contribute to inflammation and immune dysfunction.

Coconut oil, despite being 95 percent saturated, is an excellent oil to use with fibromyalgia and other immune deficiency conditions because it contains high levels of a medium-chain fatty acid called laurate, or lauric acid. This fatty acid is readily absorbed by the body and used for energy. Lauric acid is also known to be antiviral, antibacterial and antifungal, making it an excellent supplement for intestinal disorders, which are common in fibromyalgia. Lauric acid is also found in much smaller amounts in butter.

Due to the widespread rhetoric that grains, legumes and vegetables are better than animal foods for fibromyalgia, it is typical to see patients gorging on carbohydrates. For a person with an underlying yeast problem (very common with fibromyalgia and CFS), adrenal fatigue or hypoglycemia, this dietary prescription simply brings more problems.

Keeping in mind the uniqueness of each individual, the diet that usually benefits a person with fibromyalgia is one that is rich in fresh vegetables; healthy fats such as olive oil, flax oil, fish oils, coconut oil and butter; and high quality animal protein with moderate amounts of carbohydrates. All processed foods and refined sugars need to be strictly avoided, especially if

a yeast problem exists. Even fruit should be avoided in such cases.

Soy foods of all types should be avoided. Soy contains substances called "goitrogens," which are known to depress thyroid function.

Because food sensitivities are common with fibromyalgia, testing for them is a must. Food sensitivities can cause a bewildering array of symptoms, including chronic fatigue. Eliminating offending foods often produces visible health benefits. The most common food sensitivities are wheat, corn, peanuts, cashews, citrus fruits, nightshade plants (potatoes, bell peppers, eggplant, etc.), egg whites and pasteurized milk. One must remember, however, that ANY food may be an offender.

## DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Dr. Bernard Jensen has said that all chronic diseases have a digestive disorder either causing or complicating them. With fibromyalgia, this certainly appears to be true. Bowel cleansing should be considered, especially if there is a history of constipation. If candidiasis or parasites are involved, herbs such as enteric-coated garlic and black walnut (green tincture) and grapefruit seed extract are indicated, along with probiotics. "Leaky gut" conditions can be ameliorated by avoidance of sensitive foods and consumption of gelatin-rich bone broths. The free-form amino acid l-glutamine is excellent for rebuilding the intestinal wall. Digestive enzymes with additional hydrochloric acid are strongly recommended to insure proper absorption of nutrients. (Avoid hydrochloric acid if an ulcer is present.)

## NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Depending on the person, different supplements will be needed. Typically, the patient is deficient in calcium, magnesium, vitamin D, B complex and essential fatty acids. Calcium can be helpful in cases of insomnia and allergies. Malic acid combined with magnesium is a standard supplement for fibromyalgia and CFS as these nutrients are key to energy production. Pantothenic acid and vitamin C are usually indicated to strengthen the adrenal glands, typically weakened in cases of immune deficiency, especially if allergies are a factor. Combination antioxidants are excellent for controlling free-radicals and inflammation, again usually present with allergies. Sublingual vitamin B12 often helps to relieve fatigue as does organic beef liver, rich in B12 and immune-enhancing vitamin A.

If circulatory problems are an issue, niacin (not niacinamide) is very helpful. The flushing sensation it produces helps to relieve pain and dilate the blood vessels. L-phenylalanine is also excellent for pain relief. (Avoid if pregnant, nursing, or subject to panic attacks.) Coenzyme Q10 can also help with immune function and tissue oxygenation.

The amino acid L-tyrosine is useful in promoting mental alertness and relieving depression. It is also indicated in cases of hypothyroidism. (Avoid tyrosine if you are taking an MAO inhibitor drug for depression.)

The amino acids ornithine and GABA can be taken at night to help with sleep. Ornithine also strengthens the immune system and helps to remove ammonia from the body.

The use of glandulars to strengthen the adrenals, thymus, thyroid, liver and spleen is a standard therapy for fibromyalgia and CFS. See your health provider for the best combination for you.

Since adrenal stress is a prominent feature of fibromyalgia, elevated cortisol levels are usually present. At elevated levels, this hormone suppresses the immune system and can cause many symptoms common to fibromyalgia. Pregnenolone in a dosage of 30-100 mg taken in the morning can alleviate these symptoms. It is available over the counter. The ultimate solution, however is to remove the sources of stress.

## HERBAL THERAPY

As long as one is not allergic to it, cayenne pepper is superb for pain relief and for enhancing circulation. Cayenne can be taken internally, or applied externally as a liniment.

Licorice and Siberian ginseng can help strengthen the immune system and adrenal glands. Licorice is also helpful in regulating blood sugar levels. Gotu kola is fine for enhancing memory and circulation, as is ginkgo biloba. Valerian root, lavender and skullcap are good for promoting sleep. Milk thistle is indicated to help with liver cleansing, as well as to control free

radical activity. Turmeric is also good for this, as well as for relieving inflammation and aiding digestion.

## HYDROTHERAPY & EXERCISE

For morning stiffness and pain, a hot shower or bath is good for getting the circulation going. If you are showering, try to turn the hot water off for a few seconds a couple of times during your shower. Studies have shown this hot-cold treatment to be effective at relieving pain.

A little bit of exercise each day is often helpful, especially if hypothyroidism is a factor but be careful not to over exert yourself.

## HOMEOPATHICS

The remedy *Rhus toxicodendron* is excellent for relieving morning stiffness. This remedy is indicated for pain that gets better with motion. The 6C potency is best.

*Bryonia* is indicated if the pain felt gets worse with motion. Again, the 6C potency is best.

*Arnica montana* is useful for a “bruised” feeling and may be taken internally or applied externally as a gel or cream.

Be sure to avoid all exposure to camphor, coffee, or menthol when using homeopathic medicines.

One should also explore, with a suitably trained practitioner, the use of a “constitutional remedy” geared to the emotional qualities of the patient, as described in the following section.

## THE EMOTIONAL ELEMENT

Often overlooked as a pivotal factor is the role of past emotional traumas in the development of fibromyalgia and CFS. Though the issues may be different from one person to the next, rooting out and facing past emotional hurts is absolutely necessary. For example, one woman I worked with had reached a plateau in her therapy with me. She had come a long way, but

eventually I felt like I was “chasing symptoms” and getting nowhere. During the months I worked with her, no discussion of any emotional or personal matters came up. I decided to explore this.

It turned out that she and her husband hated each other, but she could not divorce him because she needed his financial support as she could not yet work due to her illness. I then found out that her husband was a very manipulative and controlling individual who had actively quashed her plans to attend college and get a better job. Not surprisingly, her mother had also been manipulative and controlling and my patient had married young to get away from her. I concluded that the years of being pushed around and controlled had simply exhausted my patient’s adrenal glands, key in the stress response.

In this session, my patient released a lot of anger, but felt she had made a breakthrough in realization of what she needed to do to take control of her life. The more she strengthened her adrenal glands with herbs and protomorphogens, the better she became. Several months later, she felt strong enough to work part time and her husband was transferred for two years overseas. She did not accompany him and looked on his departure as an opportunity to fully recover.

Another patient, suffered from extreme guilt over her son’s death several years before. She felt that she, by her life-style then, had contributed to his demise. Since this patient was the type of person who bottled up her feelings, I decided to try a couple of doses of a homeopathic remedy called *Natrum muraticum* in the 10M potency. The administration of this “constitutional remedy” helped her immensely in releasing a lot of pent up sadness and remorse. For all people with fibromyalgia, the determination of the appropriate constitutional remedy is paramount. Consulting with a practitioner trained in classical homeopathy is advised.

One can also use the Bach Flower remedies to help with resolving past emotional hurts. Remedies will vary according to the individual.

## SOLVING THE PUZZLE

Fibromyalgia is a complicated and challenging illness that has no single solution. Finding the combination of approaches that will work for each person is both the challenge and the

reward for this perplexing modern disease.

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A reader writes in with a different view:

## A PROTOCOL FOR FIBROMYALGIA

I would like to point out an inaccuracy on your website in an article by Stephen Byrnes, in which he states that fibromyalgia “is a new name given to an old condition, one involving chronic inflammation of the muscles and the fibrous connective tissues that cushion the joints.”

According to Professor St. Amand of UCLA—who is an authority on the disease: “Fibromyalgia is not autoimmune and it is not inflammatory. That is known for sure. Cells have been examined for inflammation and there is none. No trace of antibodies has been found and there has never been tissue destruction in fibromyalgia.” Thus, any treatment based on the assumption that it’s an inflammatory disease will be ineffective.

St. Amand postulates that fibromyalgia is a genetic disease. In some people it is active from childhood. In others it is triggered later by trauma or infection. Scottish researchers have recently reported distinctive genetic patterns in ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis) sufferers. I personally know many families where almost everyone has ME, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. A lady I met recently has fibromyalgia and so do her four daughters. The odds that this is random are around 10,000,000,000 to 1!

Dr. St. Amand believes the disease is caused by a genetic kidney dysfunction that leads to a buildup of phosphates in tissue cells. To prevent cell death, the cells take in more water to dilute the phosphates. This causes the tissue to swell, pressing against nearby nerves. This is the best explanation I have seen for the presence of pain without inflammation—an unusual combination.

Scientific evidence for this theory is beginning to accumulate. But the main evidence is clinical: Dr. St. Amand has developed a protocol that reverses the disease using a safe and inexpensive over-the-counter drug called guaifenesin. In his own practice, well over 90 percent of his thousands of patients have regained their health. This is a far higher rate of recovery than any

other protocol to date. The protocol can be self-administered.

St. Amand has discovered a pattern of tissue lesions distinctive to ME/FMS/CFS. These can be palpated by any experienced body worker after a little training. The presence of these lesions indicates strongly that the protocol will help. The breakup of these lesions while on the protocol indicates strongly that symptoms will shortly improve. I have been in contact with literally hundreds of people who have benefited from this protocol. If you look at Dr St Amand's *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Fibromyalgia : The Revolutionary Treatment That Can Reverse the Disease* (available on Amazon), you will find many hundreds more testimonials. Personally, I'm in the early stages of the protocol but progressing well—the prognosis is good.

If St. Amand is correct, and I'm increasingly confident he's on the right track, diet can only play a secondary role in health recovery. What is needed is a protocol to help the body rid itself of the excess phosphates.

Personally, I have been eating a traditional diet for some time now with no reduction in symptoms. I've introduced the approach to other sufferers for its general health benefits, but they didn't experience any relief of symptoms either. The key exception is the many fibromyalgia sufferers (mainly women) who also suffer from hypoglycemia. Dr. St. Amand proposes a hypoglycemic diet, which helps reduce symptoms somewhat for these people, but they don't regain health with this alone.

Some time back the Centers For Disease Control did a major long-term study of recovery rates from fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. The results were extremely pessimistic—only a very small percentage of long-term sufferers improved. Despite the claims of many complementary practitioners to be able to reverse the disease, they found no evidence for this. There was no evidence that diet or naturopathic treatments (or any other treatments) were successful. Compare this to the 95 percent success rate of Dr. St. Amand's patients who achieve major long-term improvements.

I'm a great fan of the WAPF. As the standard bearers for sensible eating, it is surely vital that all articles on the site are accurate, up-to-date and evidence-based. The article on fibromyalgia contains a major factual inaccuracy and proposes a treatment for which there is no research evidence. I feel that there is a strong case for taking the article off the website.



Geoff Caplan  
Los Angeles, California

*Thank you for introducing us to this fascinating information. We will post your letter on our website along with Byrne's article. The theory that fibromyalgia has a genetic component does not mean that fibromyalgia is inevitable in those who inherit the gene. A family in which everyone suffers from fibromyalgia may also share the same diet and same environmental stresses. The malfunction of the kidneys and the build-up of phosphates suggest several precautionary actions that can be taken to prevent the disease, including avoidance of foods containing components toxic to the kidneys (such as anti-freeze in commercial ice cream and microwaved foods, in which kidney toxins are formed). Obviously, commercial soft drinks containing phosphoric acid could be stressors. Cod liver oil—our old favorite—to supply vitamins A and D, will provide strong protection to the kidneys, and saturated fats ensure healthy cell membranes to facilitate the body's efforts to get rid of phosphates.*

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## About Stephen Byrnes, ND, RNCP

Stephen Byrnes, BA, MA, DR(AM), was a nutritionist and naturopath who grew up in New York and attended Hunter College in New York City where he received his BA in Comparative Religion. After moving to Los Angeles, he completed his MA in Humanities at California State University at Dominguez Hills. He then received his Diploma in

Homeobotanical Therapy from the Australasian College, USA, a state-licensed college in Lake Oswego, Oregon, and his Doctorate of Alternative Medicines from the Alternative Medicines Research Institute (AMRI), a licensed and registered educational institution in Gibraltar, European Union, affiliated with the Open International University of Complementary Medicines, Colombo, Sri Lanka. He later received his Graduate Diploma in Naturopathy from the Canadian Alternative Medicines Research Institute (CAMRI), Vancouver, British Columbia. CAMRI is licensed and registered with the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of British Columbia.

Dr. Byrnes had over 100 articles and papers published in health magazines and professional journals around the world. He was an honorary board member of the Weston A. Price Foundation and an editorial board member of the Australian holistic magazine WellBeing. He also authored four books: Digestion Made Simple (Whitman Books; 2002); Diet & Heart Disease: It's NOT What You Think (Whitman Books; 2001); Overcoming AIDS with Natural Medicine (Healing Light Ministries; 2001); and The Lazy Person's Whole Foods Cookbook (Healing Light Ministries; 2001).

Dr Byrnes died of a stroke in 2004 at the age of 42. During the final years of his life, he suffered extreme physical, emotional and financial stress, including threats from a stalker and having to defend himself in a frivolous lawsuit. He is greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues at the Weston A. Price Foundation.

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