

Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue: A Nine Step Approach to Healing

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Most people with Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) can achieve substantial improvement. Often times, it is lack of information on the part of the patient and practitioner, and lack of an organized approach, that leads to sub-optimal outcome. The steps described below represent a synthesis of several medical and non-medical literatures. With a commitment to utilize as many of these steps as possible, healing can occur.

What is Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

When medicine calls something a "syndrome", versus a "disease", it means that there is a constellation of symptoms with no clear mechanism. FMS is a syndrome usually associated with painful muscles, fatigue, lack of restorative sleep, foggy mental function, nerve pain, irritable bowel or bladder, and other symptoms. CFS is like FMS, but the predominant symptom is fatigue, with or without pain. According to the American College of Rheumatology, the accepted diagnosis of FMS requires 1) Pain of at least 6 months duration with no identified causes; 2) Pain in all four quadrants of the body (upper, lower, right and left). If it is not in all four quadrants, it is called "Myofascial Pain Syndrome", and may or may not progress to FMS; 3) Pain in at least 11 of 18 defined "tender points".

CFS (and some with FMS) may have other symptoms, such as low grade fever, swollen glands (lymph nodes) and multiple chemical sensitivities.

Many people with FMS/CFS have their symptoms for years and may even have one or two surgeries before the diagnosis is made. Pain tends to move around and mimic other diagnoses, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, cervical and lumbar discs, appendicitis and the like. Fatigue also varies from hour to hour and day to day.

What is the Cause of FMS/CFS?

As stated above, the "cause" remains unknown. Most likely this category of illness represents different sub-groups of people, whose illness manifests with similar symptoms. There are both genetic ("inborn") and lifestyle factors involved. There are five main theories or models for FMS/CFS; in most people, more than one mechanism is pertinent:

1) an imbalance in the nervous system, characterized by lack of Stage IV sleep, magnified perception of pain, and autonomic and endocrine system dysfunction.

2) a genetic or acquired defect in phosphate metabolism, which causes "toxicity" and which can

be "reversed" by use of guaifenesin (Dr. Paul St. Amand's model).

3) a defect in thyroid hormone processing—either the conversion of T4 to T3, a receptor defect for T3, sometimes associated with anti-thyroid antibodies (an autoimmune component)

4) a metabolic model, which has to do with genetics, nutrition, colonic imbalance ("candida and/or "leaky gut"), allergies, carbohydrate metabolism, and toxins.

5) an "energetic" model, involving emotion, spirit, and allergy, which cannot yet be explained by modern medicine, but which suggests that modalities like yoga, acupuncture, and energy techniques such as Reiki and Neuro-Modulation Technique can help.

Evaluation and Treatment for FMS/CFS

Before treatment begins, there should be a thorough medical evaluation to rule out conditions that may cause a fibromyalgia-like state, or that will reduce the success of treatment. At some point in your treatment, special tests to help determine the unique characteristics of your biochemistry that will provide clues to help your healing in a most efficient manner.

The most comprehensive and successful treatment for FMS/CFS includes all of the following components, briefly explained, in order of priority:

1) education and plan—unlike other medical conditions in which the patient can passively follow the doctor's directions, in this condition, you must learn about and actively participate in treatment, including some hard decisions about what you are willing to do and not do. The information you will gain will validate your experience and allow you to formulate a plan. Keeping a record book or journal will help you stay organized.

2) right partners—doctor, family, friends, employer. They may need to be educated so they can be supportive. You also need to be your own right partner as well, being consistent and following through on your commitments. Lastly, learning how to deal with the toxic forces in your life is extremely important, since they can't be avoided completely.

3) sleep hygiene—restoring a normal sleep-wake cycle is critical to improving energy and reducing pain. Measures include going to bed and waking up the same time each day, reducing naps, keeping the bedroom dark and quiet, and other measures;

4) facilitative body/mind modalities—such as acupuncture, massage, chiropractic, biofeedback, and Feldenkrais—to decrease pain, enable exercise and activity, and sometimes "jump-start" the healing process;

5) medications—to address the causes (not just the

symptoms) of this condition, such as sleep disturbance, phosphate metabolism, thyroid metabolism and immune function;

6) nutritional intervention--this involves several aspects: a) addition of basic dietary supplements; b) reduction/elimination of caffeine, soda, hydrogenated oils and other additives; c) reduction/elimination of certain allergenic foods; d) and adding specialized supplements to address specific metabolic/ functional/genetic imbalances in your body;

7) yoga--gentle stretching, strengthening, awareness and personal exploration. People with FMS/CFS commonly are in a battle between mind and body--yoga gives an essential opportunity to restore a healthy relationship;

8) gentle aerobic exercise--helps build mitochondria to provide energy to reduce fatigue, restores sleep, mood and immune function;

9) "spiritual" work--an exploration of the "meaning" of your life and your relationship to your health and illness. While not necessarily the "last" step, for some patients, working on the inside is difficult, requires energy, and trust in the process (and practitioner) that can only occur after some improvement is achieved.

First Steps

While people with FMS/CFS feel desperate to see some quick results, it is absolutely necessary to go one step at a time. By the time they've been diagnosed, most patients have jumped around between providers and treatments. If they do too many things at one time, it will not be possible to observe the effects of each intervention in an organized fashion. It is potentially harmful to healing to miss the benefit of a certain drug or other intervention because it was confused by other factors, or by inconsistency or impatience. Patients must be patient (!), consistent, and committed--recognize that you need to make an investment of time and energy to help you efficiently find the best path for your life.

Starting with the priority list above, a patient should develop a customized plan with the assistance of the professional who will serve as their "primary" FMS/CFS practitioner. It is your goals and prioritizes that determines where you go and how fast. Some people seek immediate relief--others prefer a less aggressive, long-term approach. The ultimate goal is to minimize medications and to optimize lifestyle.

Once treatment begins, your practitioner should see you back in the office every 2-8 weeks, depending upon multiple factors.

Between visits, some practitioners can handle a brief email or phone call; for more detailed questions or problems, an office visit is necessary. Please be mindful of the pressures of practitioners' time--go to

each visit with a focused list of issues, and respect the realistic limits placed by insurance companies on how much time the practitioner can spend with you in each visit.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

For More Information

- O Be cautious about using the web as your sole reference---there is lots of misinformation regarding FMS/CFS.
- O Dr. Cheikin offers Workshops and materials to help you on your healing journey. Call for information and to be placed on our contact list.
- O See my related articles on: Detoxification, Elimination and Simplification and What We Really Need
- O My website, www.c4oh.org, has helpful articles on related topics
- O Cheikin, Michael: [Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: A Nine-Step Pathway to Healing](#).
- O Cheikin, Michael: [Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: A Nine-Step Pathway to Healing: Workbook](#).
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- O Starlanyl, Devin J et al: [Fibromyalgia Advocate: Getting the Support You Need to Cope with Fibromyalgia....](#) New Harbinger Pubns; ISBN 1572241217, 1998.
- O St. Amand, R. Paul: [What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Fibromyalgia](#). New York: Warner Books, 1999. ISBN 0-446-67512-1.
- O Bland, Jeffrey: [The 20-Day Rejuvenation Diet Program](#). Los Angeles: Keats, 1999. ISBN 0879-839-805.
- O Cameron, Julia: [The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity](#). Penguin, 1992. 0874-776-945.

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