

Aromatherapy and Fibromyalgia/Fibrositis

What is Fibromyalgia/Fibrositis?

Fibrositis is the name that was formerly used prior to fibromyalgia, or Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS).

Fibromyalgia Action UK, describes the condition as follows:

“Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition of widespread pain and profound fatigue. The pain tends to be felt as diffuse aching or burning, often described as head to toe. It may be worse at some times than at others. It may also change location, usually becoming more severe in parts of the body that are used most.

The fatigue ranges from feeling tired, to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness. It may come and go and people can suddenly feel drained of all energy – as if someone just “pulled the plug”. Fibromyalgia is a common illness. In fact, it is more common than rheumatoid arthritis and can even be more painful. Prevalence of Fibromyalgia: A Survey in Five European Countries (see www.fmauk.org/prevalence for details) put the prevalence of FM at between 2.9 and 4.7%. People with mild to moderate cases of fibromyalgia are usually able to live a normal life, given the appropriate treatment.

If symptoms are severe, however, people may not be able to hold down a paying job or enjoy much of a social life. The name fibromyalgia is made up from “**fibro**” for fibrous tissues such as tendons and ligaments; “**my**” indicating muscles; and “**algia**” meaning pain.

Symptoms

Besides pain and fatigue fibromyalgia symptoms often include:

- unrefreshing sleep – waking up tired and stiff
- headaches – ranging from ordinary types to migraine
- irritable bowel – alternating diarrhoea and constipation, sometimes accompanied by gas in the abdomen or nausea
- cognitive disturbances including lack of concentration, temporary memory impairment and word mix up
- clumsiness and dizziness
- sensitivity to changes in the weather and to noise, bright lights, smoke and other environmental factors
- allergies

Fibromyalgia is not new, but for most of the last century it was difficult to diagnose. Part of the problem has been that the condition could not be identified in the standard laboratory tests or x-rays. Moreover, many of its signs and symptoms are found in other conditions as well – especially in chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

Two Canadian doctors developed a way of diagnosing fibromyalgia in the 1970s and in 1990 an international committee published requirements for diagnosis that are now widely accepted. Once other medical conditions have been ruled out through tests and the patient's history, diagnosis depends on two main symptoms:

- pain in all four quadrants of the body for at least three months together with
- pain in at least 11 out of 18 tender point sites when they are pressed. The “tender points”, or spots of extreme tenderness, are rarely noticed by the patient until they are pressed.

What Causes Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia often develops after some sort of trauma that seems to act as a trigger, such as a fall or car accident, a viral infection, childbirth, an operation or an emotional event. Sometimes the condition begins without any obvious trigger. The actual cause of fibromyalgia has not yet been found. Over the past several years, however, research has produced some insights into this puzzling condition. For instance, it has been known that most people with fibromyalgia are deprived of deep restorative sleep.

Current studies may find out how to improve the quality of sleep and some of the prescribed medicine is specifically aimed at addressing the lack of restorative sleep.

Research has identified a deficiency in Serotonin in the central nervous system coupled with a threefold increase in the neurotransmitter substance P, found in spinal fluid and which transmits pain signals.

The effect is disordered sensory processing. The brain registers pain when others might experience a slight ache or stiffness. It is hoped that more research will discover the cause and result in more effective treatment.

Managing Fibromyalgia

The best way to cope with fibromyalgia is to use a number of techniques that ease the symptoms as much as possible.

Relaxation is one technique that works really well for almost everybody with fibromyalgia. It reduces tension in the mind and body right away. The results are calming for all the symptoms, especially for the pain. Relaxation can be learned from books, tapes, videos or special courses.

Heat is important. A hot water bottle and hot baths or showers will help reduce pain and banish morning stiffness. Soaking hands and feet in hot water for a few minutes can ease their aching. Exercise is the most common prescription for fibromyalgia.

Although no particular diet has been shown to help fibromyalgia, a healthy, balanced diet is important to provide protein, vitamins and minerals. It is best to avoid or at least cut down on coffee, tea and alcohol. Some sufferers have a tendency to gain weight and this can be distressing in itself. If you follow a healthy diet this should in turn help with your weight control.

People with fibromyalgia can have good days and bad days. On a good day it is important to pace yourself; overdoing it may simply make matters worse. Rest is also important. Listen to your body when it tells you to slow down.”

How Can Aromatherapy Help with Fibromyalgia/Fibrositis?

In view of the fact that the cause of fibromyalgia is as yet unknown, Aromatherapy treatments can only hope to aid in reducing symptoms. Based on the above, these mainly involve pain relief and poor sleep quality. For the latter, you are recommended to view the IFA article on ‘Aromatherapy and Insomnia’. However, for pain relief, the following essential oils may offer some assistance.

- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*)
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Thyme ct linalool (*Thymus vulgaris* ct linalool)
- Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- Black Pepper (*Piper nigrum*)
- Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

In addition, the use of Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) and/or St John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) as carrier oils may also offer some pain relief.



Always contact a qualified Aromatherapist who will guide you on the oils that are suitable for your individual needs.

References:

<http://www.fmauk.org/>

The Art of Aromatherapy by Robert Tisserand

Aromatherapy – An A-Z by Patricia Davies

The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy by Salvatore Battaglia

The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

Encyclopedia of Aromatherapy by Chrissie Wildwood

Essential Oils in Colour by Rosemary Caddy

Aromatherapy Workbook by Marcel Lavabre

To find a practitioner to discuss your needs [click here](#)